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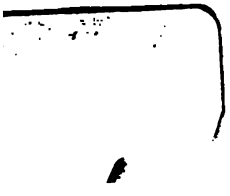

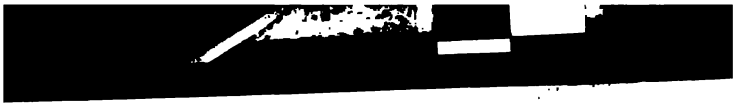

MISS PERCIE OF CLIFDEN.

BY

C. J. H.

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MISS PERCIE OF CLIFDEN.

CHAPTER I.

"Her pedigree—good sooth, 'tis long!
Her grim sires stare from every wall;
And centuries of ancestral grace
Revive in her sweet girlish face."

DINAH MARIA MULOCH.

"And the ivy veined and glossy
Was enwrought with eglantine,
And the wild hop fibred closely,
And the large leaved columbine,
Arch of door and window mullioned did entwine."

MRS. BROWNING.

IF any of my readers happen to sojourn for a time in Northumberland, I hope they will not fail to visit Clifden and the Manor. Clifden is a queer old place, nothing much beyond a fishing village; but the Manor is full of interest, and one could wander through the rambling old house and mag-

nificent park forever. The place has gone, or rather is going, rapidly to decay; what was once a well-kept lawn, sloping gently down to the cliffs, is now little else than a weedy expanse, the paths overgrown, and the once fantastically trimmed yew trees now straggling and ugly; still the old gray stone house stands rearing its ivy-mantled walls, that have weathered the storms of many a winter, proudly toward the sky, as stanch and secure as when its first owner rode from beneath its portcullised gateway nearly six centuries ago. A superannuated gardener is the only human being about the place, who is fond of dwelling upon the past splendors of the family, and telling of the beauty of Geraldine Percie, the only child of the late master, Sir Roger Percie, Baronet. I have been all over the old house many times, have visited it in its prime, when Geraldine Percie was the beauty of the county; alas! those times have long since passed, and Clifden on the failure of heirs has reverted to the Crown.

After this preamble I think I may safely launch out upon my story, trusting to be able to make you well acquainted with the place before I close. Every one has heard of the Percies of Northumberland, so it is useless to enter into their pedigree; suffice it to say, that Sir Roger Percie was one of the veritable Percies whose ancestor came to our shores in that ship, which must have been enormous to contain all the ancestors of illustrious families who came over with the Conqueror. Roger Percie at the early age of ten succeeded to the baronetcy and estate, and from henceforth was the magnate of the district. As he grew older, his mother sent him first to Eton, then to Christ Church, Oxford, and lastly accompanied him to the Continent for two years of foreign travel. She died while abroad, and Sir Roger returned home at the age of six-and-twenty, very rich, very handsome, and, under existing circumstances, very interesting. Quantities of bright eyes turned in the direction of the Percie family pew on the first

Sunday of his return, and remained stationary during the service, but on the next Sabbath things were vastly changed. That wonderful "some one" who is to be found in all small gossipy places like Clifden, had told some one else that the baronet was unavailable, being already engaged to Lady Aline Monford, the only daughter of Earl Montague. This report proved true, and, as soon as his period of mourning was over, the marriage was solemnized with great splendor, and Sir Roger and his lovely bride took up their abode at Clifden.

Their married life passed happily and quietly, the great event of each year being the periodical journey to town for the season. At last, after ten years of uninterrupted happiness, Lady Percie died of typhoid fever contracted during a visit to Rome, leaving her only child, Geraldine, a girl of eight, to the sole guardianship of her father. Sir Roger, being handsomer at seven-and-thirty than most men, with difficulty escaped the snare of the fowler —in other words, numerous fair damsels who mani-

fested a deep interest in the little Geraldine, but his adoration for his only child rendered him invulnerable, and at seventeen she was passionately attached to the man whom the world called cold and unfeeling, but who was all sunshine and tenderness to his motherless girl. Few who came in Miss Percie's way found her otherwise than lovely. A strange air of romance, like a rosy cloud, hung about her; she lived for the greater part of the year in the great old house, with no companion save her father. She was allowed to associate with no one about, and the only glimpses the Clifden villagers caught of her were as she drove to and from church. Every year she went up to town with her father, at which time she received instruction from various masters, her education at home being carried on entirely by Sir Roger. In this way Geraldine had passed the nine years since her mother's death, wandering about the old house, loving every nook and cranny of it, with its ghostly corridors, and chambers reported to be haunted.

The place she liked best of all was the long picture gallery, with the Percie Arms emblazoned on the ceiling, and the long lines of portraits on either side—portraits of her ancestors for many, many generations. Some of them smiled kindly down upon the lonely little girl, while others glowered at her over their high stiff ruffs as if in anger, —angry that the old warlike line had terminated, and the slight childish figure was all that remained to bear the name that their deeds of prowess had rendered famous; angry that the hands of a true Percie would never more brandish a sword in the country's service. There was the Lady Ermintrude de Percie in her velvet gown and coif, beautiful as a vision; but Geraldine liked best of all the portrait of her mother, painted in her wedding dress with the Percie diamonds conspicuously displayed.

On the morning our story opens, Geraldine Percie was sitting alone in the pretty morning room that her father had fitted up purposely for

her; elegant little trifles that delight the hearts of young girls were scattered everywhere in tempting profusion; a Skye terrier slept placidly in the window seat, and a canary bird was singing merrily in its gilded cage. A color box lay open on the table, but Geraldine had ceased her arduous task of reproducing a bunch of azaleas, and was leaning back in her easy chair. It was a pretty picture taken as a whole, and not the least lovely was the young girl in her easy graceful position. Miss Percie was acknowledged to be the handsomest girl in the country. Though naturally excessively proud and reserved, her manners were to all fascinating, easy, and graceful. She was tall and slender, with an oval face and faultless features, although the lines of the mouth were haughtily curved; she had great dark eyes, which, though at times hard and cold, were capable of great depth of expression; her brows were dark and delicately pencilled, and her hair was the brightest, veriest golden, looking as if the sunlight had in some in-

explicable way become entangled in its luxuriant meshes, and lingered there. Although she set every known style of beauty at defiance, belonging in some measure both to blonde and brunette, I doubt if you could anywhere have found a lovelier specimen of maidenhood. Geraldine was roused from her reverie by the entrance of her father, a dark handsome man, to whom she bore a most unmistakable resemblance.

"Up in the clouds as usual; Gerry, my love, are you aware that it wants but ten minutes to eleven, at which time you were to ride with me?"

"Oh! papa, I am really very sorry," she replied in a musical, well modulated voice. "I was trying to sketch these, but somehow my flowers never turn out well;" and she rather dubiously extended them for inspection. Sir Roger smiled at the attempt. Geraldine Percie might well say she dabbled in the fine arts, it was most unmistakably so; her drawings were very poor, but as everything she did, whether bad or good, was commended by

her father, no one was likely to inform her of the fact.

"Wait, dear," said the baronet as she was hurrying off, "I have a letter from your grandmamma that I want you to see and tell me what you think of it."

Geraldine took the letter from her father's extended hand, perused it hurriedly, and threw it impatiently upon the table, while a little smile of scorn played about her well-cut mouth. "I might have known how it would be almost before I read it. Always the same old story; why can grandmamma never leave us in peace?"

"I certainly think things can remain as they are, but I will consider the matter and let you know in the morning; in the mean while we will say nothing more about it." Sir Roger drew nearer the window as his daughter left the room, and again drew forth the letter. It was written in an angular hand upon richly embossed paper bearing a huge cipher, and ran as follows:—

LONDON, March —.

DEAR ROGER: I really feel that it is my duty again to interfere about Geraldine. She ought certainly to have a chaperone; it is not right for a young girl like that to remain without an older person in the house with her. I also think she is quite old enough to come out; so, when you return to town, do bring her with you, and it will give me great pleasure to take her about. Montague says he would like immensely to have a young girl about the house; and I know several very eligible young men for her. When you go abroad this summer, do leave her at Gresham Abbey with us, for it is a shame she sees nothing at all of life. Do think over my plan, and decide favorably. Give my best love to Gerry, and tell her we will do our best to make her enjoy herself.

Your affectionate mother,

G. MONTAGUE.

Sir Roger frowned. His mother-in-law was continually interfering in some way or another,

and had never ceased since his wife died to endeavor to get possession of Geraldine. It grieves me much to be obliged to say that Miss Percie was not particularly fond of the Countess; so, when she came down for the ride, she was in anything but an enviable frame of mind. "Why should I want any one here, papa?" said she, as they rode off together. "Who is there for me to see? I know what it is, she is trying to make a match; I am destined for Fred Monford, he is always at Gresham when I am there;" and Gerry made a wry face which showed that Lady Montague's efforts at match-making were not appreciated by her young relative. By the time they returned home it was settled that Sir Roger, instead of returning to town, should remain at Clifden with his daughter, and then escort her to Gresham in August, a proceeding which pleased Miss Percie immensely, insomuch that it kept her father with her altogether, and put off the dreaded day.

"You are just the dearest man alive," cried Gerry rapturously, as she embraced her father.

"Which shows your knowledge of the noble sex to be somewhat limited," he replied, kissing her fondly; "when you come back from Gresham I shall be nowhere, you will not speak to me then."

"I most certainly shall not unless you behave better; come, Snap;" and she left the room.

Sir Roger sat for a long time before the fire that night, wondering if he were doing right in allowing Geraldine to remain so entirely alone; terrible pictures haunted him of the melancholy fate predicted for her by her grandmother if she were left so much to herself, but after much reflection he considered that Gerry was vastly superior to most young ladies of her age, after which no doubt quite unbiased conclusion, he retired for the night. The time at last came for Geraldine's visit to the Abbey. Lady Montague had written several times to hasten her coming,

but nothing would induce her granddaughter to come sooner than the time fixed upon at first. It was towards sunset of an August day when our travellers entered the massive gateway of Gresham. The approach to the Abbey was through a well-stocked park; the building itself was a model of Gothic beauty; half of it was in an almost ruinous condition, and, as the Earl considered it little less than sacrilege to touch one stone of the old place, the family were never there except for the shooting season, the rest of their time being spent at a more modern residence nearer London. Lady Montague, a tall fine-looking woman, met Sir Roger and his daughter on the doorstep, and extended to them a warm welcome.

"You are just in time, my dear," said she to Gerry, when they entered the house. "No one has come as yet but Fred, who is very anxious to see you, and I want you to help me receive the guests, who will be arriving all the time now."

"I shall be very glad to do anything I can to help you, I am sure," replied Miss Percie.

Lord Monford at this moment came forward, and the whole party, after exchanging greetings, separated to dress for dinner. Of all Lady Montague's grandchildren Monford was her favorite, perhaps because he was to be the future possessor of the place, perhaps the fact of his being all that was left to remind her of her eldest son, whom she had loved better probably than anything on earth; be that as it may, the viscount was in high favor at the Abbey. He was rather an insipid youth of about five-and-twenty, with no pretensions to good looks, being very fair and rather effeminate; around him hovered an odor of London clubs, and high life in Belgravia. He was one of those scions of noble houses who make it their business to gather important bits of scandal, dine out as often as they can, dress in the height of fashion, and make themselves especially and conspicuously agreeable.

"Quite a small party, you see," said Lady Montague; "I really thought the Cliffords might arrive this evening, but it is too late now."

"You don't see much of life at Clifden do you, Gerry?" remarked Monford in a patronizing tone.

"Quite as much as I wish," she answered, tossing her head; "I have been at other places besides Clifden, you know."

Rather nonplussed at his cousin's audacity, he turned his attention to the wine.

"Good sherry this, grandfather; some of Thompson's, I suppose."

"Yes, I like it very much; but your uncle thinks it rather worse than that we had last."

"Who can that be?" interrupted Lady Montague; "I believe it is the Cliffords." So it proved; and, as they are to play a conspicuous part in these pages, I think it well to give them more than a mere glance.

Reginald Clifford, the elder of the two, was about one and thirty; he was handsome, tall, and

well built, with dark eyes, hair, and moustache; in his manner reserved and very quiet, but notwithstanding was excessively popular with his own sex, for he was very clever, had travelled everywhere, and was possessed of all the good qualities a man should have. Audley, the younger, was some five years his brother's junior, darker and even handsomer than Reginald, jolly and clever, a thorough ladies' man. Of course he made all sorts of sport of his elder brother, but he inwardly respected, nay, even envied him those qualities which his shallow superficial nature was incapable of possessing. The Cliffords were orphans, and since boyhood Reginald had been sole guardian of his younger brother, a position which he found anything but easy to fill. Audley had been very wild as a student, and his brother had been called upon on several occasions to rescue him from rather unpleasant circumstances. Reginald, as the eldest son, of course succeeded to the baronetcy, large fortune, and estates of his

father, a thing for which his brother never forgave him, although his allowance was far more liberal than the generality of brothers would have made it. Fred Monford sank considerably into the shade on the arrival of these guests, Audley being exactly the person a British *materfamilias* shuns, fearing that her daughters may forget, in his good looks and fascinating manners, the dreadful fact of his being a second son. An introduction to Miss Percie followed their entrance. Sir Roger had known them for some time; and they were soon as merry as possible over the dessert.

As soon as the gentlemen joined the ladies in the drawing-room, and coffee had been dispensed with, Lady Montague claimed the Earl, Sir Roger, and Sir Reginald Clifford, to make up the whist table. Sir Roger pleaded fatigue, and his early departure on the morrow, as his excuse, and Fred, much against his will, was forced to be his substitute. This left Gerry and Audley *tête-à-tête*, not to the distaste of either, who were soon

good friends; then Audley, saying he had heard much of Miss Percie's musical powers, prevailed upon her to play, and led her in triumph to the piano, from which she did not rise for some time.

CHAPTER II.

"Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,
Quick as her eyes, and unfixed as those;
Favors to none, to all she smiles extends;
Oft she rejects, but never once offends;
Bright as the sun her eyes the gazers strike,
And like the sun they shine on all alike.
If to her share some female errors fall,
Look on her face, and you'll forget them all."

POPE.

THE ladies did not make their appearance until late the next morning, and they found the morning room deserted by all save Fred, who was reclining upon his grandmother's sofa with a magazine in his hand.

"Good-morning, ladies; I thought you would never come. How are you, best and dearest of grandmammas? and are you homesick, Gerry?"

"Very," replied Miss Percie; "don't I look it?"

"You look remarkably blooming," he answered. She tossed her pretty head, but made no reply.

"I wish you would make yourself useful, Freddy," said Lady Montague, seating herself at her writing-table with a quantity of visiting cards before her.

"I am quite at your service; the others, you know, are off for the covers, but I don't see the fun myself of blazing away in the hot sun for hours."

Now Monford was anything but a good shot, but, as he generally held aloof from all sports where his weakness might become known, no one was any the wiser.

"Here is your morning's work, if you are in such an enviable frame of mind," said the countess,

placing a package of envelopes and a long list of names before him. "These are for the garden party on the 29th, and these for Geraldine's birthday dance on the 1st."

"So you're going to have a dance, are you? Well, I hope you will favor me with a waltz," said Fred, settling his pen and commencing his work.

"Who are Sir Charles and Miss Fannesley of Pomfret Towers?" queried Geraldine, glancing over her cousin's shoulder.

"Miss Fannesley is a great beauty, and they are very highly connected. I don't know about the Blackheaths; they say Sir Andrew's uncle was in trade, so you had better leave him out, as one must draw the line somewhere." Lady Montague, having finished her portion of the envelopes, rose and left the room, followed by her granddaughter, and Fred saw them drive away a few moments later to attend to some shopping in the village. The party reassembled at luncheon; Geraldine found herself seated beside Sir Reginald, of whom

she was the least bit afraid, but he was so merry and kind that she was quite reassured, and he thought Miss Percie a remarkably clever, well-informed young lady. Audley Clifford was her *vis-à-vis*, and kept staring fixedly at her with his great dark eyes; he was really getting desperately attentive, but Geraldine showed no preference to either. She was pleasant and cordial, and, if her conversation was more free with Audley, it was merely because she felt more at her ease with him than with his graver brother. They were to ride that afternoon—Lord Montague, Sir Reginald, Audley, and Miss Percie. Monford was going to return some visits with his grandmother, preferring a lounge in the comfortable landau to a wild scramble across the moors. It was a perfect day, a serene unclouded summer sky above, and a good road beneath their feet. Geraldine had been from childhood a fearless rider, and, being perfectly at home in the saddle,

appeared to great advantage on horseback. Fred stood on the door-step watching them ride away.

"You had better keep an eye to Gerry, I think; she seems rather gone on Audley Clifford, and if it is like this after having known him such a short time, what will it be by and by?"

"You know what I wish it to be, Fred; you were made for each other."

"I seem to have been made for a good many people, according to your ladyship. You told me last season, I was made for Lady Helena Davenport, season before it was Miss Lewis the Anglo-Indian heiress, and now it's Gerry. I think I'll go in for some one I wasn't made for."

"Don't be a goose, Fred," said Lady Montague. "Here is the carriage."

"Now this is what I enjoy," said the viscount, as he leaned luxuriously back among the comfortable cushions. Lady Montague smiled benignly upon her favorite grandchild, and the carriage drew up at the Fannesleys. The afternoon passed all too

quickly for Monford, who was not at all averse to being petted by the fair sex, who could not but make much of such an eligible *parti.*

Geraldine, too, found her ride very pleasant. Audley Clifford was constantly at her side, and so excessively clever and amusing that by the time they reached the Abbey she was willing to vote him by far the most agreeable of her male acquaintances. Lady Montague frowned and bit her lip as they entered the house together; things must not go on as they had begun. Audley's attentions in that quarter could not be countenanced, and she sighed as she took her seat at the table.

The only expedient which presented itself to Lady Montague was the presence of another young lady at the Abbey; perhaps then young Clifford, who was undeniably fickle, might confine his attentions to her, and leave her pet plan in regard to Fred and Geraldine in a fair way to be carried out.

Miss Percie herself, whatever her feelings might be, was kind alike to all, showing no preference whatever; so nothing could be laid to her. It was not her fault that Audley Clifford found her fascinating beyond every one he had ever met; that Fred was ready with all his assumed nonchalance to place his heart at her feet; how could she help being beautiful and coquettish any more than the sun can help shining? However, Lady Montague that very evening dispatched a note to Miss Fannesley, requesting her presence at the Abbey as soon as possible, and her mind completely at rest, retired to her couch to confused dreams of Fred and Geraldine.

Two days later Miss Fannesley arrived, and in her Miss Percie found no mean rival. Irene was, like herself, an only child; the petted darling of an invalid mother and an easy-going father, she had made her *début* some two years before, and had gained for herself the reputation of being the most heartless flirt in London. She was a brunette of

the most decided style. Although not tall, she was remarkably stately, and her carriage could not but be remarked in the most crowded drawing-room; altogether Geraldine might well be displeased at her grandmother's introducing such a dangerously fascinating young person in their midst. Audley never relaxed his attentions, and was as devoted to Miss Percie as ever, so Lady Montague gained nothing by her trouble except the pleasing fact that Monford was more in love with Miss Irene than was at all pleasant.

And what were Sir Reginald Clifford's feelings all the while? Even he himself would have been at a loss to tell you. He, the man of the world, hitherto invulnerable to female charms, had been entrapped by this girl, who had not even had a season!—fallen an easy prey to the liquid eyes and winsome smile of Geraldine Percie, to whom it was as natural to coquette as to breathe, who scrupled not to play with any one's affections, and throw them aside as useless playthings as occasion

offered. He was her slave, her most devoted adorer; her presence was his sunshine. Ah! foolish Reginald, her smiles are precarious sunlight, but many wiser men than thee have succumbed to the fascinations of a girl like our heroine. And yet Clifford would not acknowledge, even to himself, that he looked upon her in any other light than a pretty child. He was not insensible to her faults, for our heroine was no model, but her little imperfections rendered her all the dearer to him, and before the close of the shooting season he became aware that she had stirred his affections to their very depths, and that she, and she alone, was the one woman he had ever seen whom he cared to make Lady Clifford.

At one-and-thirty Reginald had never yet seen any woman in whom he took more than a passing interest, in the few ball-rooms which he was prevailed upon to frequent. He was sought after and made much of, for he was too eligible a *parti* to easily escape the watchful mammas or still more

watchful daughters; but none of them, the beauties of the various cities that he had seen, had ever caused those dark eyes to soften or even look interested. Clifford, unlike his brother, did not wear his heart on his sleeve for daws (or rather maidens) "to peck at." He took things at their real worth, smiled at the interest manifested in his welfare by motherly hearts, was indifferent to the homage his own sex yielded him, and lived pretty much within himself. People called him cold and heartless; Heaven knows! perhaps he was; but, if they could have heard his sigh as he bid adieu to Gresham, and seen the fond, hungry look in his eyes as Geraldine turned to wish his brother good-by, they might have changed their opinion.

Audley was very silent all the way to town, replying in monosyllables to his brother's queries as to the state of the luggage, etc.

"What is the matter with you, Audley?" said Reginald; "I never saw you so quiet."

"Oh! nothing," replied his brother, shifting his

position, and intently regarding himself in the strip of dusty looking-glass above his head; "I am only tired after that tramp in the turnip field yesterday; shooting is all very fine, but I prefer other things, I must confess."

"Such as what?" questioned Reginald.

"Oh! well, flirting with Miss Percie for instance; nice little girl that, rather green, but very good fun—there I forgot, you don't admire the fair sex."

Reginald darted a quick angry glance at his brother, which totally escaped Audley, who was busily engaged in a tussle with a refractory buckle on his rifle case.

How dared he use Miss Percie's name in that way?—that name which he scarcely liked to speak. It seemed almost like profanity to his noble heart; he could scarcely bring himself to answer civilly.

"I did not know that I was too far gone to admire a pretty face; I suppose I may make some

exceptions, and Miss Percie is one of them; she is by far the finest girl I have ever met."

"Ha! sets the wind in that quarter?" said Audley tauntingly; "well, at this rate we had better leave an extensive order at the first upholsterers, for the decoration of the family vault (with all due deference to Deergrove Park) for the reception of its future mistress, Lady Geraldine Clifford. How well it sounds!"

Reginald glanced quickly into the handsome face before him, and Audley saw by the look in his brother's eyes that he had gone quite far enough. At this moment he ungenerously resolved that, cost him what it might, he would secure Geraldine Percie's affections, if only to disappoint his brother; a truly manly resolve, and one quite worthy of Audley Clifford.

The season was advancing rapidly, and the returns to town were many. Any one glancing down the column of fashionable intelligence on the morning in question might have seen among

the recent arrivals, "The Earl and Countess Montague, Miss Percie, and Miss Fannesley from Paris, at No. 3 Park Lane for the season." Reginald Clifford saw this as he sat at his late breakfast in the club dining-room; it gave him a strange thrill of pleasure to know that she was again so near. They had been off, travelling on the Continent since the autumn, and Reginald devoutly blessed the "House" for bringing them home. He had scarcely finished his coffee when Monford strolled leisurely in, looking much the same as when they parted.

"Hallo, old boy! glad to see you. Why didn't you come up with Audley last night? we expected you." So Audley knew they had returned, and had not told him. Ah, well! he did not know how much their coming was to him; it never entered his mind to mistrust foul play on his brother's part for a moment; he did not know the meanness of his brother's shallow nature, did not know how his brother intended to reward him for his years of

care for the headstrong boy, and generosity for the extravagant young man; and no doubt it was just as well, for such baseness, so foreign to his noble nature, would have led him to despise and hate the man who called himself his brother.

"I was not aware you had returned," he replied, quietly; "I intend calling, however, this morning, if you think the ladies will receive me."

"Certainly, and on the way you must stop in with me to see my new chestnut; I want your opinion, as I know you to be no mean judge of horseflesh."

Fred took his companion's arm, and they strolled along Pall Mall together. "You ought to take a run over to Paris, old boy," said Fred, affably, enjoying the prestige of walking thus familiarly with one of the most popular men in town; "you see my cousin, Miss Percie, whom you met last autumn at Gresham, and have probably forgotten" (ah! if he could only forget), "comes out at the drawing-room to-morrow, after

which there is to be a ball, for which, by the by, I have a ticket for you," and he plunged his hands into his numerous pockets, and at last succeeded in his search and drew forth a creamy envelope addressed to Reginald Clifford, in a pointed feminine hand—*her* hand, no doubt.

"Well, as grandma is to do the thing, nothing must do but we must go to Paris, where we met Sir Roger, who intends going round the world in the Marquis of Dentwith's yacht. As they spent most of the time shopping, I enjoyed myself in the way I like best, lounging round and doing nothing."

Reginald smiled. "That is not my idea of enjoyment."

"No, perhaps not; but I like to rest, as I have such a pull at the House every season."

Reginald nearly laughed outright at the thought of what the viscount's idea of going to the House meant, and what a valuable acquisition he was

when he got there. "I see Miss Fannesley is with you; how is that?" he queried.

Monford made a wry face. "That old hack! I really believe she is trying to see how many seasons a girl can go out without having an offer; why old Fannesley has gout, or something, and can't come up to town, so grandma, being a charitable lady, has offered her an asylum for the season, worse luck!" At this moment they arrived at the mews where the chestnut was, and, the examination having proved perfectly satisfactory, they adjourned to No. 3 Park Lane.

CHAPTER III.

"Sweet, thou hast trod on a heart!
Pass, there's a world full of men;
And women as fair as thou art
Must do such things now and then."

MRS. BROWNING.

"THE last time in a chrysalis state," said Geraldine, glancing gayly at herself in the pier glass, at the white plumes in her golden hair and the creamy folds of her satin dress. "This time to-morrow I shall be out, a real young lady. How do you feel, Miss Percie, at the prospect of your first drawing-room?" and she made a sweeping courtesy to the lovely reflection in the mirror, and then turned to find that Sir Reginald Clifford had entered the room unannounced, and been a silent spectator of her childish performance; what must he think of her? She turned and extended a

slender little hand in a many-buttoned white glove. "You see I am quite giddy, Sir Reginald, at the prospect of my first appearance in society." She crimsoned so prettily, and looked altogether so bewitchingly lovely, that he would have given worlds to have told her, then and there, how dear she was to him; but he refrained.

"Yes, it is a great event, and by this time to-morrow London will ring with your name. I foresee a brilliant future for you, and cannot but count myself fortunate in being a friend of your younger days;" and he made a low bow, and then they both laughed at his nonsensical speech.

"How do you know I call you my friend?" she said, smiling.

"I can but hope —" and then he checked himself, and turned to the window, while the pretty, foolish little compliment died on his lips, and gave place to a heavy sigh as his brother was announced, and he watched the bright flush deepen on her cheeks as Audley entered.

"Why! Reggie," his voice expressed very plainly his surprise at seeing his brother, "you here!"

"Yes, I came to consult Lord Montague on business, and have been too much occupied with Miss Percie to find him;" and Reginald walked away to speak to Lady Montague at the far end of the room.

"So you have made another conquest, have you?" said Audley, turning towards her; "well, I congratulate you."

"Don't be silly; here is occupation for you, hold my bouquet while Fred fastens my glove for me, and to reward you for your amiability you shall have one of my roses for your buttonhole." Audley took the proffered flowers and waited patiently while Fred struggled with the refractory buttons; and the carriage was soon announced. Lady Montague settled herself comfortably with her granddaughter beside her, who, from time to time, glanced with conscious pride at the shimmering satin of her very first train, arranged upon the seat

before her. The countess was a happy woman that day, as her eyes rested upon the lovely creature before her. She was a regal-looking girl, and would no doubt create a sensation; then her thoughts took a new turn. "Who is Fred with?"

Geraldine, roused thus rudely from the contemplation of her white plumes and pearls, started slightly.

"How childish you are, Gerry; didn't you hear me?"

"Oh! yes, he is with Irene; at least I think so."

Lady Montague drew in her lips slightly. "I wish he wouldn't be with her so much; one minute he is abusing her, and the next desperately in love; you never know how to take him. Oh dear! what a number of carriages; do you suppose we shall ever get there? another stop; how tiresome!"

But Geraldine was scanning eagerly the windows of a house they were passing, her own home! She had stood at those very windows for many consecutive seasons, and watched the be-feathered and

be-jewelled dames rolling along as she was doing now. And what delights were beyond unlimited balls and operas? Oh how nice it was to be alive! At this moment another carriage drew up near them, and Miss Percie saw through the half-closed curtains her grandfather, Irene, and Fred.

The viscount was at times desperately attentive to Irene, who received his advances with the utmost *sang froid;* she was too used to that sort of thing, having been a reigning belle for two seasons. She was particularly cold and repelling in her manner to Monford; but he called it her way; he did not know that this same reserve was but a cloak to hide her real feelings. Her first season had been a decided success, and her triumphs had been many. From time to time she had met Reginald Clifford and been fascinated by his indifference to her charms; in vain did she try her best to captivate him, he stood as far aloof from her as ever, until, discouraged, she had flown to the other extreme and flirted with each and every one who came in

her way. With him, however, she was all gentle, womanly tenderness; he never saw that cold proud look in her dark eyes; but he paid no attention whatever to her, and it was with feelings of the bitterest hatred she watched his growing affection for Geraldine. She had consented to become Lady Montague's guest for the season, cherishing meanwhile a vague hope that Miss Percie's presence in the house would bring him nearer her side.

"Well, and did you enjoy the ball last night as much as you expected?" It was Reginald Clifford who spoke. According to usual custom, he had dropped in to dinner to find Geraldine alone by the fire in the darkening drawing-room, a pretty picture in her simple muslin adorned with its broad blue ribbons.

"Oh! yes," starting a little, "I liked it very much indeed." Miss Percie had now been out for about two months. The cold winds of February had given place to the balmy air and precarious sunlight of early April. All her friends had de-

clared she had been the sensation of the season, and no gathering was considered complete without her presence; many suitors, too, had found their way to her side. An heiress has generally enough attention, and Geraldine's beauty alone was enough to engage the affections of any one. She was a sorry flirt too, but perhaps that was not her fault; her heart had long since gone out of her keeping; there was *one* with whom she was always herself, for there was a vein of coquetry in the girl's nature, and that one was Audley Clifford. Little did Reginald dream, as he settled himself beside her, that the being whom he worshipped was in love with his brother. Fond foolish Clifford! he had fought manfully against this all absorbing passion; to-night he had come to learn his fate from her lips—anything was better than the horrible suspense of the past weeks, and she had been very kind to him of late.

"The rooms were so full that we could not see you when we left."

"Yes, I know you went very early," he stooped to caress Snap, who was reposing at his mistress's feet, blinking at the flames. There was an awkward pause for some moments; he was the first to speak.

"Have you heard from your father lately?" trying to speak easily and naturally.

"Yes, we had a letter from Malta to-day. He will be back early in the autumn, as they have given up going round the world. There! I must go up to grandmamma; you will excuse me, won't you?"

"One moment; I have something to say to you." He rose and stood before her, looking so handsome with the firelight flickering upon his manly face.

"Geraldine, I will not detain you long. I have something I must tell you; even though I feel sure you must despise me for my audacity;" and then he told her all, how he had loved her since they had first met, how his heart was all hers, and without her love his future would be a dreary

blank not worth the having. And she listened without a word until he paused almost frightened at his own eloquence.

"I am very sorry that you should have said this;" there was not a trace of any emotion in her voice; she was perfectly calm. "I hope I have not encouraged you; if I have, I am deeply and truly sorry, for I can never think of you, Sir Reginald, in any other way than as a dear friend of papa's, and as such I like and esteem you."

"I am not so very old, Geraldine; only two-and-thirty last month, and—"

"Can you not take no for an answer? Even if I did love you, Sir Reginald, I could not pledge myself to you, for my heart has long since gone out of my keeping."

"Do not think me audacious; think of me, if you wish, as your father's friend, and let me stand for a moment in his place, then tell me who—"

"Never," she answered, setting her white teeth firmly, while a dangerous light played in her dark

eyes, for the warlike Percie blood coursed strongly through her veins.

"Never! by striving, by your idle curiosity, to gain my confidence, you have forfeited all claim to my esteem; you have behaved in a most ungentlemanly manner," her passion getting the better of her. "I never wish to see your face again—go."

"Very well, I am gone; good-by, and God bless you, my darling. If you ever need a friend, hard and bitter though the things you have said to me have been, you will find in me one who would shed the last drop of his heart's blood to spare you any pain. I am no coward, Geraldine Percie, and if it had not been that your lips had proclaimed those things I should never have borne it. As it is, time will show if idle curiosity, as you are pleased to term it, impelled me to question you. I shall be careful that we never meet again until you wish it; good-by." He stooped and kissed her forehead, and she heard the hall door close behind him. Even then she could not

know the priceless boon that she had refused. A man like Reginald Clifford gives his whole heart to the woman he loves; and Clifford, as he left the Montagues' door, and sternly turned his steps towards his well-appointed home, vowed to turn the key upon the sweetest passage of his life's history, and in some distant land forget if possible the injury she had done him.

Geraldine had scarcely recovered her astonishment when her grandmother entered. "Why, where is Sir Reginald? Lewis said he was here."

"So he was, but he is gone now," in a muffled, half-tearful voice from the window seat.

"Gone? Nonsense, child. Why didn't you keep him? he was to dine here, you know."

"Yes, I know," still more muffled.

Now Lady Montague's perceptions had been quickened by age, so she began to suspect that all was not quite right.

"Geraldine, did you tell him to go?" and the voice was shrill with excitement.

"'Yes," with great defiance.

"Then you are either utterly blind to your own interests, or perfectly heartless. I never saw such a girl. Do you know what you have refused?"

"Perfectly. To honor and obey a man I couldn't love, and make myself miserable because he is an estimable friend of papa's; bah! if I want an old one, I can find plenty, but, oh dear! I wish you wouldn't talk so," and the defiant tone ended in a burst of hysterical weeping.

That night the tall figure of a man might be seen restlessly pacing the deck of the Calais boat, while the cliffs of Albion faded in the distance. It was Reginald Clifford. He had entered the house pale and haggard at about dinner time, surprised his gentleman valet at a game of all-fours with a neighboring footman for shilling points, made known his intention of starting that evening for the continent, and without a farewell word to his many friends, or a pang at leaving his native

land, started on his lonely journey. I say without a pang; there was one whom it was like death to leave, but she had ordered him from her presence; and now the lovely face, with its dark angry eyes and encircling halo of golden hair, haunted him as he smoked his cigar; and this he was trying to forget.

CHAPTER IV.

"In that ancient hall of Wycombe, thronged the numerous guests invited,
And the lovely London ladies trod the floor with gliding feet;
And their voices low with fashion, not with feeling, softly freighted
All the air about the windows with elastic laughters sweet.

"For at eve the open windows fling their light out on the terrace
Which the floating orbs of curtains did with gradual shadows sweep,
While the swans upon the river, fed at morning by the heiress,
Trembled downward through their snowy wings at music in their sleep."

MRS. BROWNING.

A SULTRY August day, with not even the tiniest breeze to ruffle the glassy surface of the artificial lake upon which the stately swan floated

gently, with nothing to disturb her serenity. The curious towers and gables of Clifden cast weird shadows on the emerald turf, and in their shade tables and chairs were grouped together as if recently vacated. Several picturesque sun-hats were reposing upon the grassy slope of terrace, the fair heads which they became so well being at present pressed to snowy pillows, while the London belles enjoyed that most delicious of all repose—an afternoon nap. The manor, as we have said before, fronted on the ocean; but at the back the loveliest of inland views was discernible, the dim outlines of the heather-clad Cheviots forming the boundary line. The dining-room windows opened upon a grassy terrace, adorned with exquisite flowers and statuary, from which a flight of broad, easy steps, guarded on either side by a large stone lion, led to the lake, which was prettily shaded by quivering aspens and bending willows. To the right, a plantation of young lindens formed a delicious retreat for

a warm afternoon; a hammock had been slung where the shadows were deepest, and in it lay Geraldine Percie, the latest novel in hand, idly rocking to and fro.

Her brilliant season had been rather wearisome, pleasant though she had found it, and she was not sorry when the heat and glare of London rendered a longer stay impossible. Sir Roger Percie, too, had returned from his cruise and carried his daughter and a large party of the beauty and fashion of the metropolis to pass a few weeks at Clifden, with Lady Montague for chaperone. Audley Clifford had come among the number, and Miss Percie hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry; his brother was still abroad, travelling everywhere, doing his best to outlive his unrequited love. Audley, although he had been very attentive all the season, had done nothing more than the many who were always dancing attendance upon our heroine, and who sighed in vain for her hand.

Clifford, however, if he did cherish any grand passion for Miss Percie, had never told his love; he had heard with composure the various reports circulated in Mayfair, regarding the Northumbrian heiress, in which her name was coupled with every eligible and ineligible *parti* in town. His friends did not know in what light he regarded her, even Geraldine was quite at sea on the subject.

Clifden Manor had never been gayer; bright dresses fluttered through the dim shrubberies and sweet, dewy conservatories; gay voices echoed in the grim old house, and light dancing feet gayly trod the velvety lawns. Once more the sounds of life were heard about the place, and the humble villagers stared in open-mouthed astonishment, when the manor party rustled into the great curtained pew, over the rail of which the golden head of Geraldine Percie had appeared since childhood. And there were dances, and garden parties, and moonlight sails in Sir Roger's yacht,

and the whole party did nothing but enjoy their butterfly existence, and flirted and gossiped, unmindful that, no matter how long the day, the dark night comes at last, and no life is quite free from sorrow.

"And so the belle of the season has actually come down to reading a novel in a hammock in a retired village?"

Geraldine started—it was Audley Clifford who stood beside her, in his flannel morning suit, with a flower in his buttonhole.

"Yes, actually; but it is not such a great come down, for I have a very interesting book."

"From which you do not care to be disturbed," he interupted; "I am gone in that case."

"No, no, wait one moment;" and she rose from her reclining position, while the novel fell unheeded upon the head of the sleeping Snap, who, roused from sweet dreams of rats and mice, and thinking the sky had fallen, rose with a growl.

"I have scarcely seen you since you came, you have been so taken up with your other friends."

"I might pay you back in your own coin, and say you have been too busy with Miss Fannesley; but I will be generous, Mr. Clifford," seeing his brow contract in an ominous frown, "and if you will go, I'll order Martin and the ponies at five, and we'll have a nice drive while I do the honors of the country to you."

"Thanks, a delightful idea, and one which I accept with pleasure; until five then, *au revoir*."

She watched him walk away whistling a gay air from Lecoq's latest opera, and then leaned back with a weary sigh. Snap evidently thought his mistress mad that afternoon, for, instead of finishing her usual lounge and allowing him to return to his nap, she rose hurriedly and went in the direction of the house, along the deserted terrace, and, pushing open a long diamond-paned window, entered the pretty morning room where we first made her acquaintance a year ago. Then,

she had been a gay, careless girl; now, a girl still in years, but a woman in feeling, with the shadow of her unrequited love darkening her pathway. How silent the pretty room was, and how cool and pleasant. Her father had evidently just vacated it, for his writing book with a half finished letter upon it lay open on the davenport. The Dresden clock chimed four as she stood listlessly leaning against a great *jardinière* filled with rare plants which stood in the deep embrasure of a bay window; half-past four—still she did not move; at last the cloud cleard from her face, and with a bright smile she hastened to her room.

Now one of Clifford's characteristics was unpunctuality; never, in the whole course of his life, had he been in time. It was nearly half-past five when Miss Percy descended to find that her cavalier had not yet arrived. She was faultlessly dressed that afternoon, had taken good care to be so, knowing how fastidious Audley was in every

detail of a lady's costume, and it made a pretty picture—the tall, graceful figure of the girl, with the dark manor for the background. The phaëton was there, and the chestnut ponies were champing their bits impatiently, and pawing the gravel with their dainty hoofs—while the groom, in his natty dark-green livery, pipe-clay breeches, and irreproachable tops, stood passively by, not altogether unconscious of the amorous glances cast upon him from time to time by Miss Percie's French maid, who was assisting her young lady in the arduous task of fastening her gloves.

Geraldine at last became impatient, it was so tiresome, and she was not used to such treatment; unable to bear his rudeness any longer, she sprang into the phaëton, and gathered up the reins. At this moment Clifford sauntered round the house, hoped, in the most nonchalant manner, that he had not kept her waiting, and took his seat beside her, while Martin scrambled into the

rumble as the spirited little animals started forward at the word of command.

"I thought you might have repented and made up your mind not to come," said she, every trace of ill humor vanishing under the genial influence of his presence.

"Do you think I would willingly forego this pleasure?" he answered.

"I am sure I don't know," a little sullenly, as the flutter of a white dress caught her eye, and Miss Fannesley disappeared through the hall door.

Clifford saw the frown and the look she gave her rival, and smiled a superior smile; here, at least, he was sure of the success that awaited him.

"I am not going through the avenue, it takes too much time; but we will drive through the village and down on the sands, coming home by way of Pomfret Towers and the ruined Abbey."

"Very well, that will be charming; and with such a companion!"—he bent eagerly towards her.

Miss Percie tossed her head. "You would say

that to any one you happened to be with; so you need not try and propitiate me in that way for keeping me waiting."

"Oh! come, Miss Percie, I'll allow it was too bad, and never shall happen again;" and he was so profuse in his apologies and so eager to be forgiven that silly Geraldine thought no more about it and was happy.

The drive was charming; every turn in the road opened another page in the lovely book of nature spread before them; they had left Clifden far in the background, and were fast approaching the sea; it was very pleasant to walk the ponies along the smooth sand, and listen to the ceaseless roar of the waves; and those two silly young people often recalled it after, as one of the bright spots in their lives. Audley was pondering a weighty matter, turning over and over in his mind the question, was it worth while to ask Miss Percie to become his wife? He was sure she loved him, sure that she would accept his offer, but was he sure that he

loved her, or was it merely the broad acres and long rent-roll of Clifden that made him anxious for the prize? There came a little twinge of conscience at the last thought; she was lovable, but he could spare no time from his self-worship; there was no corner of his heart that was not filled with his own image.

They had passed Pomfret Towers now, and were nearing the ruined Abbey; they could see its ivy-mantled walls rearing against the glorious sunset-tinged sky.

"If you have never been here before, I think we had better get out of the phaëton and look around a little, and there is a curious old wishing-well that you must see." She tossed the reins to Martin before he could reach the ground, and entered the ruined cloister; not, however, without secret misgivings. What would Lady Montague say if she knew that her carefully reared granddaughter was poking about in the ruins of the old Abbey, *sans chaperone*, with Mr. Clifford? They wandered

about for some time; the grounds were beautifully picturesque, and the ruin one of the finest in the vicinity, so it was no wonder they found it hard to leave the spot.

"Now for the wishing-well," cried Geraldine, as they came upon an old moss-covered rock, at the base of which bubbled up a clear stream of water.

"Isn't that delicious, Mr. Clifford?" as she handed him a draught in the silver travelling-cup which she had brought.

"Yes, I have never tasted better."

"I hope you have not forgotten the wish, which is by far the most important part, and if it does not come true you may be very much surprised."

"Then you are the surety for its efficacy. In that case, Miss Percie, I shall hold you responsible, inasmuch as with you, and you alone, lies the power to effect my wish; I have but one thing in this world to ask for, one boon which you can grant me, I ——"

"Good evening; I hope I am not interrupting you."

If a look could have silenced the intruder, Monford would have remained mute for the rest of his life; but he paid no attention whatever to his cousin's glance or her companion's ill humor, merely bowed and joined them.

"I think we have seen everything, and had better go," said Miss Percie, with dignity. "I am sorry, Fred, that I cannot offer you a seat."

"Oh! its of no consequence, since grandma is here in the landau and wants you to come with her, as she is afraid the night air might increase your cold."

Miss Percie was furious; how dared Lady Montague play the spy upon her movements? By this time they had reached the carriage.

"Come in, Gerry dear; I saw your phaëton here, and thought, as it was so late, you had better come in the close carriage," said Lady Montague, drawing up her silks and laces to make room for Miss Percie.

"Thanks, you are very kind, but I am not in

the least afraid, and am quite ready to take the risk; come, Mr. Clifford." And before Lady Montague had time to recover from her astonishment, the phaëton had driven off.

"Now what do you think of that? Come in at once, Frederick, and don't stand gaping at nothing."

Lady Montague was justly incensed. She had been set at naught before her own servants by a girl who was ruining all her prospects by allowing the attentions of a second son. The countess had known all along how it would be, had known that she was doing wrong in allowing Sir Roger to bring him to Clifden, but she had of late been thrown completely off her guard by his seeming indifference to Geraldine. That afternoon, returning from a round of visits, she had seen the phaëton at the Abbey gates, recognized Audley as she saw him pass the Fannesley lodge, she being at the time about to emerge from the avenue,

and Fred had devised this brilliant scheme for taking her home.

Lady Montague was silent and morose for the rest of the drive, and Fred wished himself at home many times before the walls of the manor loomed before them.

Miss Percie, to her grandmother's vexation, had not yet returned, and did not make her appearance until darkness had set in and the lights were gleaming upon the terrace through the open windows.

There was no one in the hall; so she stopped to refresh herself with a glass of claret from a silver pitcher upon the table, and Clifford passed up stairs to dress.

Geraldine leisurely drew off her gloves, threw her hat upon the divan, and seated herself upon a low chair near the empty fireplace. The hall at Clifden was one of the handsomest of the many handsome rooms in the house. It was a great square apartment, with a high vaulted roof,

and an inlaid marble floor. The absence of carpet was amply compensated for by large Persian rugs placed in every available space; a divan stood in the centre, and curiously carved chairs were everywhere; suits of armor, flags, and antlers adorned the wall, and an old-fashioned fireplace filled almost the whole side of the room. It was the favorite lounging place with the manor guests, and this was the only hour of the whole day when one was apt to find it deserted.

There was to be a dance that night at a neighboring house, and Geraldine half determined not to go. But then it might look strange; so she rose and hastened up stairs as the bells in the clock tower chimed nine. Several doors opened as she passed along the corridor, and a chorus of voices were heard, making all sorts of inquiries about the state of the weather, the prospect of a good attendance, and various other topics.

Geraldine enjoyed herself immensely that night, and even forgot her dignity so far as to join, with

great fervor, in an impromptu "Sir Roger" with the gouty Sir Charles Fannesley. It was a delightful drive home, with the moon shining brightly, and Miss Percie was gayer and more light-hearted, more like her old self, than she had been for some time, for Audley had found time to bring the interrupted Abbey conversation to a satisfactory conclusion, and on the following morning her father's sanction would be given. Happy were her dreams that night, and bright her morning waking; she did not know what the end was to be —how should she?

CHAPTER V.

"Thus, if thou wilt prove me, dear,
Woman's love no fable,
I will love thee—half a year
As a man is able."

MRS. BROWNING.

SIR ROGER'S consent was easily gained, for, as Geraldine knew, as long as she was satisfied he would be so too; he, however, laid one restriction upon them, and that was, that nothing should be said about the engagement until the Manor party had broken up: To this they did not make any objection, as the first of September was drawing near, and then the separation would take place; the Fannesleys would leave for the sea-shore, Lady Montague and Fred for a round of visits, and our heroine and her father for the Continent, so it was not a long prohibition. It was very pleasant for

Audley to feel that in some way he was the possessor of the heiress, that he shone in her reflected splendor, and the halcyon day sped all too quickly. Miss Fannesley and Monford were growing desperate. Rumor said they were engaged; Miss Fannesley did not contradict it: but those who knew her, wisely nodded their heads, and said she was playing fast and loose with him, as she had so often done, and he was a fool for his pains.

Lady Montague entered Geraldine's morning-room the day before the party was to separate, and found Geraldine and Audley deep in a new book, arrived that morning from town; he was reading aloud, and Sir Roger was lying half asleep on the sofa, while Geraldine's fair head was bent over her tapestry.

"A charming party, and one which it gives me great annoyance to interrupt," the countess remarked, with hidden sarcasm in her voice. "I am excessively sorry, Mr. Clifford, to be obliged to

ask you to retire, as I wish to speak with my son and Miss Percie on a matter of great importance," and she sank with dignity into the nearest chair. Audley, dismissed thus summarily, rose with the utmost good nature; he knew he had outwitted her, and could afford to laugh.

"I shall see you again at luncheon, Miss Percie," and he left the room.

"Roger, are you blind?" cried the exasperated dowager, as his retreating figure disappeared.

"The Percies have always been renowned for their clear-sightedness, but I am getting old, so perhaps my eyes are not what they once were;" and he opened them wider, and rose to a sitting posture.

"Then you are an idiot, an unmitigated idiot!"

"Oh! I hope not," he answered.

Lady Montague was exasperated. "You know what I mean; how can you countenance that young scoundrel's attentions? How can you sit silently by and be made the tool of your own

child's destruction? He may make very fine promises, but he has done the same to every girl he met since he left off knickerbockers. It is a sin and a shame; Fred can tell you, Reginald can tell you, what a scamp he is. I do not like to interfere, but I will not see poor Aline's only child sacrificed. A stop must be put to it."

"It is rather late in the day for that now, since things have gone too far. I am competent, I fancy, to look after Geraldine's interest, and I am quite satisfied that he is a whole-souled young man, and I respect and esteem him; more I am not at liberty to say at present."

He rose, and walked slowly to and fro, several times; the whole thing was distasteful to him, and Lady Montague worse than all.

Geraldine now interrupted, "I have borne a good deal already; I have allowed you to insult me without complaining; but now I wish you to distinctly understand one thing, I am engaged to

Audley Clifford, and under existing circumstances I wish to hear nothing more on the subject."

Lady Montague actually gasped for breath. "You engaged to that Clifford! Is it as bad as that?"

But Geraldine could not trust herself to remain longer; she had left the room, and the irate countess was left to mourn alone, for Sir Roger soon after retired. After all, it was hard, for she really loved her granddaughter as much as she was capable of loving anything, had taken great pains to have her first season a success, and really quite overstepped her usual barrier of dignity to gain Miss Percie's affections. She was far too shrewd a woman of the world not to know what Audley's real character was; but it was of no use, they were blind to his faults, and Geraldine was about to form an alliance which could not bring her any happiness. Audley was very attentive for the few days they remained together at the

Manor; he spoke of following them to the Con
nent, but he could not tell.

Lady Montague bade her granddaughter fa
well, more in sorrow than in anger. She s
nothing more about Audley, and was very qui
but in her mind she was forming many plans
which to break the engagement.

The last carriage had driven away, the l
good-byes said, and Clifden returned to its wont
quiet. The great rooms were once more clos
and the house no longer rang with gay voic
Sir Roger, Miss Percie, and Audley were alc
left of the party, and to-morrow they too wo
be gone. It had been a very pleasant month al
gether, and Geraldine gave a little sigh as s
went through the deserted rooms to see tl
everything was in order. The shadowy drawi
rooms looked as if peopled with an army of ghos
the chairs and sofas having retired into bro
holland once more. Dinner was served in t
small breakfast-room, but none of them h

much appetite. It was understood that the baronet might be absent for some time, and Geraldine thought, with a heavy heart, how much might happen ere she found herself in that room again.

The next morning the wagonette drove to the station with the last members of the party, and only the silent house remained; the servants again crept through its deserted corridors, and spoke in whispers, as if the stillness oppressed them.

"Well, Miss Percie do deserve the best of everything, and I hope she may get it," said the parlor-maid to the footman, as she closed the shutters in Miss Percie's morning-room.

"It's not always them as deserves what gets the best," he answered, philosophically, closing the door after them.

Audley escorted his fair *fiancée* to the railway station, staid with them until the train started, and then returned to his club, with the happy consciousness that he had nobly done his duty.

He fully meant to join the Percies in Paris, but somehow or other he promised a friend of his to pay him a visit, and he found his host's mother and sisters so charming that his visit was lengthened out for some time. Mildred Courtenay, the eldest of the six sisters, was a very pretty girl of about three and twenty, and he bade her good-bye with heartfelt regret—they would be coming to town soon, however; so he comforted himself in that way. He wrote often to Miss Percie, rather short uninteresting letters, it is true, but they were dearer than the most finished essays to the girl, who still loved him as much as ever. She wrote often too; they expected to winter in Italy, though whether at Rome or Naples was not quite decided. This continued all through September and October, but then by degrees his letters became shorter and more irregular. Could he be tiring of his position? Truth compels me to say that Mr. Clifford, when not near his *fiancée*, thought

little or nothing about her; but when he heard that she was much admired abroad, his ardor returned, and he resolved that, at Christmas, he would betake himself to her side. Sir Roger was far from well, he heard he had contracted a heavy cold; then report said he was quite recovered. Odd rumors were abroad concerning Audley and Miss Courtenay; rumors upon which Lady Montague enlarged with great effect in her letters to the Percies. Still Geraldine did not doubt him. At last, however, about November, she received a letter from her recreant suitor, begging to be released from his engagement. The letter was returned with the others that he had written her, a trinket or two, and a note saying that all communication must be over between them forever. Miss Percie was soon reconciled, and saw the announcement of his marriage with Mildred Courtenay some months later, with merely a sigh for the unhappy life which awaited that misguided girl. Geraldine had not time to mourn

much; it was, after all, merely the romantic attachment of a sensitive girl for an unworthy young man, and she was far too proud to mourn for one who had thrown *her* love aside.

CHAPTER VI.

"This region, surely, is not of the earth!
Was it not dropped from heaven? Not a grove,
Citron, or pine, or cedar; not a grot,
Sea worn and mantled with the gadding vine,
But breathes enchantment."

ROGERS.

DEAR reader, have you ever walked upon the chiaja at Naples, on a sunny Sunday, followed it along until you reached the Via Catterina, then turned to your right, up past the square, with its monument and four stone lions, out into the busy Toledo, where the sounds of life are unhushed even on this holy day? Here you may see true lazy Neapolitan life; at this hour it is

thronged with people, peasants in their picturesque garb; soft-eyed, dirty, interesting little children; fruit venders, with their tempting wares displayed; here and there a British traveller stalks along on his way to the English chapel hard by, but at this season of the year the tourists are mostly congregated at Rome for the Christmas-tide solemnities and festivities. A young man was idly sauntering along the shady side of the street, casting curious glances at the passers-by; his nationality is easily recognized. Who but a high-born Briton could gaze with such stolidity upon the moving panorama before him? He was dressed, too, with that peculiar nicety which marks the English tourist, and evidently attracted the attention of a couple on the opposite side of the street, a tall gentleman, and a pretty, well-dressed girl, without doubt compatriots of his own.

"Now, papa, it must be; you know I could tell Monford anywhere."

The gentleman only shook his head.

"I do not despise your powers of recognition, Gerry, my love, but Monford is at present at Gresham."

Before they could continue their dispute, the young man had crossed the street and joined them, and Sir Roger Percie, for it was no other, was obliged to surrender and say that his daughter was right.

"We certainly never expected to see you, Fred, above all people. How did you leave grandmamma, where are you staying, and how long are you going to stop?"

"First of all then, when I last heard of you, fair Geraldine, you were at Perugia *en route* for Rome, so the surprise is mutual; secondly, I am stopping at the Washington, but hope to better myself soon; and thirdly, I shall remain a week, probably more, my movements are uncertain; and now, how do you happen to be here?"

"We meant to stop at Rome, but it was so full,

and the rooms were not what we wanted, so papa thought we might as well come here; we have lovely rooms at the Victoria, and are enjoying ourselves very much, in a quiet way."

"Which seems to suit you very well; you are really handsomer than ever."

"Thanks," she answered with a pretty gesture; "you are very complimentary."

"Now, Fred, I insist upon your dining with us, so you may escort your cousin home, as I have several things to attend to." Sir Roger turned down a side street, and Monford and Geraldine walked leisurely along.

"Well, Gerry, I am glad to see you are not quite heart-broken; I expected to find you pining for Audley."

"There are some things I do not care to have you mention to me, and that is one of them," she replied, frowning.

"Excuse me, I will be more discreet in future. As it is not late, let us have a walk along the

Baiæ road, as I am so anxious to see the Grotto of Pausilippo."

"Then by all means come." So they walked on for some time in silence. The Toledo left behind, they found themselves walking along the principal promenade; groups of stone pine were on either side, at their feet the tiny wavelets broke in foamy flakes upon the pebbly beach. Capo di Monte frowned from the heights above them, and Capri, like a misty amethyst, was plainly discernible.

The giant volcano was emitting thin clouds of vapor, merely to show that it was still able at any time to overwhelm the pretty white villages nestling among the luxuriant vineyards upon its slope. A lovely scene indeed! one more beautiful I doubt if you could find, and it was no wonder that the young people were awed to silence as they gazed.

"I should so like to winter here, you have no idea how fond I have grown of the place," said

Miss Percie, as she watched the white-winged boats, with their picturesque lateen-sails, idly drifting to and fro upon the rippling water.

"I hope it has not superseded Clifden in your affections," Fred replied, wondering in a vague sort of way why he had never noticed before how very soft and dark his cousin's eyes were.

While they stroll leisurely along the shores of the Mediterranean, let us go back a little in our story, so as to enable our readers better to understand the motives of Audley Clifford in taking so sudden a step. We have seen that he cared little or nothing for Miss Percie beyond the wish to outwit his brother. While in this frame of mind, fate threw Mildred Courtenay in his path; she was just the kind of girl to suit a man like young Clifford, being very insipid, doll-like and pretty, and not likely to make any one overlook his superiority in contemplating her virtues. Of course he fell in love at once, but, liking to still keep his hold on Miss Percie, he went as far as he

could. Seeing that he must break with one or the other, he had quite made up his mind to retire without involving himself further, and join the Percies in Paris, when a letter from his brother determined him. From the strain in which he wrote, no thought of Geraldine could be lingering in his mind; he was in Athens, and expected to come home by way of Italy, arriving in London early in March. He was in such excellent spirits, talked a great deal about a young Russian Princess whom he had met, and closed by congratulating his brother on his great happiness, all so easily and naturally that Audley felt he need not have taken such desperate measures to cure his brother of his misplaced affection. The next day he dispatched a letter to Geraldine. He was a little surprised that she should give him up without a word, and disappointed too. He could not know how she, poor girl, mourned at first, and then change of scene gave her something else to think about.

Monford and his cousin walked on for some time in silence, until they reached the long flight of steps leading to Virgil's tomb, high up on a cliff, where the wind is ever sighing through the glossy-leaved lemon trees, and the melodious water chants his requiem forever—in wild, martial music such as he loved, when lashed against the rocks by the furious tramontana—soft and low and gentle, when the hot-breathed sirocco sweeps across its surface.

"I think we had better turn, Fred, as papa might be anxious if we stay too long, and, lovely as it is, we had best tear ourselves away."

They turned so suddenly that Geraldine brushed with some violence against an unwary pedestrian approaching from the opposite direction, in whom, to her intense mortification, she recognized Sir Reginald Clifford, her *ci-devant* lover, unchanged since their last meeting nearly a year ago.

"I beg your pardon," said he, raising his hat with a graceful motion peculiar to himself.

Miss Percie bowed, a very slight, cold bow, and turned towards Fred, who, fortunately for herself, was too much occupied in an altercation with an importunate lazaroni to recognize Clifford.

Reginald's face did not change, he had schooled himself too well for that, and though the old love was still surging in his breast, and he would have given almost anything to speak with her once more, he turned towards Baiæ, and disappeared in the obscurity of the grotto. Geraldine said nothing of her encounter, in fact scarcely gave it a second thought except to fancy how awkward it would be if she were called upon to meet him anywhere. The Victoria was reached at last, and dinner and Sir Roger were both waiting. It was deliciously cool, and the shaded drawing-room, with its astonishing pictures and still more wonderful furniture, was a pleasant contrast to the heated streets. Fred was very agreeable and entertaining, and Miss Percie had to acknowledge that he was better than nobody, which rather doubtful

compliment he received with the utmost good nature.

"You are really too flattering, fair coz, and that reminds me—have you ever heard grandmamma's little Utopian scheme for us?"

Miss Percie inclined her head by way of answer. They were alone on the balcony, Sir Roger having retired for a cigar, which he was smoking in the gardens below.

"I would like it, but it has some drawbacks; in the first place, we neither of us care for each other."

"I don't know what your feelings may be. I certainly could never be accused of an uncousinly fondness for you," she replied, saucily.

"Well, that's it; you see we have known each other too long for any nonsense."

"And neither of us improves on acquaintance; you might as well say it, I know you mean it, and you are too insufferably conceited for any girl in her sane mind to give a passing thought to; now

may I ask, what generous impulse made you refuse me in this manner? I have had a good many offers, but a refusal is a new thing. However, I rather enjoy variety. Go on; what next?"

And she leaned her head upon her small, shapely hand, and regarded him intently.

"Nothing, it is not worth quarrelling over; I am glad we understand each other, that is all," and he paused.

"You are one of the most comprehensible people I ever saw; it is easy to see through anything shallow and transparent."

"I am sorry you are so satirical; but, as I said before, why quarrel over nothing?" Fred was rather angry; he could not bandy words with his cousin without great detriment to himself, so willingly withdrew.

"I was not aware, good pacific little boy, that we were quarrelling; you seem to have learned your little hymn to some purpose."

"What hymn? I don't understand you."

" Then, if I fight, and scratch and bite,
In passions fall, and bad names call,
Full well I know where I shall go,"—

she chanted solemnly. "I admire the sentiment; —but what geese we are! Do look, Fred, there is that great, stupid Englishman that nearly fell over me this afternoon." Geraldine raised her voice intentionally; a sudden lull of traffic in the streets below made her words quite audible to Clifford; he raised his eyes to the pair in the balcony, but Miss Percie artfully distracted her cousin's attention, and stared stonily into his face; he did not seem in the least perturbed by her rudeness, but walked carelessly on past Sir Roger, and turned in at one of the numerous apartment houses which throng the chiaja.

CHAPTER VII.

"And thus forever throughout this wide world,
Is love a sorrow proving:
There are still many sorrowful things in life,
But the saddest of all is loving."

Some time passed without any encounter with Sir Reginald. The Percies and Fred went nearly every morning to the Museum, as a matter of duty, so they said; and they also made tours among the studios, picking up anything that was particularly pretty to beautify Clifden Manor. Geraldine enjoyed her idle life, and the many new sights that occupied their time; then in the evening there were delightful sails upon the bay in crazy little boats. Society at Naples, which had hitherto been rather dull, was now brightened by the arrival of the King of Italy and his suite, and the various nobles returned to town, also a large

colony of Britishers, most of whom were well known to the baronet. The Marquis and Marchioness of Dentwith in their yacht, also found it convenient to make it their headquarters. The Percies became involved in a whirl of gayety. The marquis, although an old man, had recently married a young and very pretty bride, and our heroine found it very agreeable to appear with such a *chaperone.* All idea of going to Rome was abandoned, and Sir Roger, at his daughter's solicitation, removed from the hotel to a handsome villa on the shore, and Lady Montague being at Rome hastened down to be with them.

One day quite a large party was organized for Pompeii. Lady Dentwith and Lady Montague went as matrons. Geraldine's newest adorer, an Italian prince, was in attendance, and, to her extreme mortification, Sir Reginald Clifford. It was so large a party that she experienced no annoyance, and merely had a chance to bow to him, which she did in a most repelling way.

He made no advances, never even noticed her after the arrival at the dépôt. The innocent Sir Roger, not being aware of any coldness, did all in his power to bring them together. Miss Percie was, however, as usual, the centre of attraction. I am afraid she gave little or no attention to the place they were visiting, thought little of the tide of gayety that had once ebbed and flowed around them, little of the lives, freighted with weal or woe, that had been lived there, the hearts that had ached and throbbed, and the unconcern of the populace, as they rushed madly on until the last great act of the tragedy came, and the fiery mass from the mountain above had worked their ruin, and left their proud city merely a show for visitors, reduced to a heap of ruins. Here was the villa of Diomed, where the fair Julia had lived her brief life of gayety, had won her triumphs, had experienced her pangs of envy and hate for the beautiful Ione; here the home of Glaucus the Athenian, where amid his

luxurious surroundings he had dreamed away his life. That home is nothing now but a picturesque ruin; the garden, tended by the faithful blind girl Nidia, has disappeared. A city of the dead! —of memories—of monuments of the past! One so young, so bright and beautiful as Geraldine, looked strangely out of place in a spot like that. Clifford retired from the rest of the party after luncheon, as pressing business, he explained to the marquis, called him to Naples.

"I think Pompeii is by far the most interesting place we have seen yet," said Sir Roger to his daughter, as they sat in the picturesque garden of their villa after their return.

Geraldine was perversely silent. She was thinking as she leaned against the marble balustrade of the terrace, thinking of Reginald Clifford; where had he gone, why was he so proud? She knew she must have offended him, yet why need she care if he was callous and cold? She could be the same. What was he to her, after all? An

acquaintance—nay, a discarded suitor. Her proud lip curled in scorn; she had trampled on his heart, thrown him aside, and fate had caused their paths to diverge, but they had met again, and she could not deny that he exercised a strange fascination over her; she was interested in him. In the mad whirl of gayety in which she had been involved, she had had no time for thought, no time for any vain regrets; but now, the sublime stillness of the night left her at rest to muse on the past. The drawing-room rose before her; she could see Clifford's face as he spoke, hear the low, impassioned tones of his manly voice as he said, "I shall be careful that we never meet again until you wish it; good-bye." She did wish it; ah! if he but only knew! she had not known how much she cared for him until he had been so indifferent. There, what nonsense it all was! To-morrow she would be the same Geraldine Percie she had always been, careless and light-hearted, caring for no one person more

than another. Ah, well! she was but a mortal after all, and, well regulated as her mind should be, it ever turned to the same subject. She was startled, and roused from her reverie, by her father's voice near her.

"Hallo, how's this, my dear girl! listen, isn't this sad, poor thing?" and he read the following from a paper he held in his hand:—

"While a party of English tourists were riding upon the Campagna some days ago, several of the horses became unmanageable; one ridden by Mrs. Audley Clifford dashed forward at full speed, and its fore-feet entered one of those hidden wells which make this spot so particularly dangerous to equestrians. The lady was thrown some distance, and has, we fear, sustained serious injuries. Great sympathy is felt for her family, as grave fears for her recovery are entertained."

Just below, in the Neapolitan evening paper, among the deaths, was—

"Suddenly, at Rome, January fourth, Mildred

Courtenay, wife of Audley Clifford, and daughter of the late Captain Sir Blagden Courtenay, in the twenty-fourth year of her age."

"Oh, papa, that is Audley's wife, poor, poor thing! and they have only been in Rome such a short time; I am so sorry."

"It is very sad," said Lady Montague; "I do wish I knew if blue or maroon is prettier for the morning-room. The only thing is, the breakfast-room is maroon; do, somebody, suggest something, for I am writing to Montague, and should like to say." And so they talked on, unmindful that there was such a thing as sorrow in the world; while Audley was alone in the deserted sitting-room at the hotel, the sunshine of his life strangely darkened, now that those gray eyes were closed forever. He had loved Mildred dearly, dearly; but that was over; she was but a name now, a dearly loved memory which would go with him to the grave. The room was just as she had left it; her gloves lay on the table, beside her walking hat

with its jaunty feather, a book she had been reading lay open near them with a spray of withered orange.blossoms to keep the place, typical of those flowers which she had worn but five short weeks before, destined to fade so soon. Ah! memory! memory! why taunt him with the happy past; why lead him back over that short, golden, rose-besprinkled path which has terminated so suddenly? He gave a weary sigh as he buried his head in his crossed arms, such a wavy, boyish head; but sorrow comes to old and young alike, and fell no less lightly in this instance, where the one upon whom the blow fell heaviest was young and handsome—a widower at six and twenty.

The next morning Reginald arrived, having travelled all night, tired and worn, but ready to stand by his brother to the last.

"My poor boy, 'tis hard, very hard, for you," and he laid his hand caressingly on Audley's shoulder.

For the first time since this great sorrow had

come upon him, he gave way completely. "She was so much better to me than I deserved. Ah, Reggie! if you only knew what I have been to you, how I have wronged you."

"Never mind that now," he answered gently; "all that is over; we will commence again."

Audley was greatly changed; an indefinable something, that had been wanting heretofore, came into his heart. He was all love for his brother, to whom he clung as weak things do when they feel they have a strong support.

There was a sublime forgetfulness of self in Reginald Clifford's character, that made him respected by all who knew him; perhaps, too, his love for Geraldine enabled him to sympathize better with his brother's affliction. Audley needed change, they would travel—he must see Greece—and the Holy Land was talked of; so one balmy January morning they set off. Reginald knew that now all hopes of his meeting Miss Percie again were at an end; in the inmost recesses of

his heart lurked a hope, that, even though a long time should elapse, a summons to her side would come at last, and, oh! how gladly he would hail it. He loved yet, as hopelessly as at first, but Audley wanted all his care and attention.

The Percies lingered in Naples, each day making it harder for them to tear themselves away; there was a strange fascination about the place, a subtle witchery, that was irresistible. Geraldine began to know every spot almost as well as Clifden, but they would soon be obliged to leave for Rome, so they must accept the inevitable. Monford found it charming also, for the Fannesleys had arrived, and Miss Irene speedily entered into his good graces and reigned in his heart sole and supreme.

"I declare, Naples never looked lovelier," cried Geraldine, as they sat on the terrace one morning amid blossoming roses and luxuriant foreign flowers. It was difficult to realize that England was now under the despotic sway of winter, that its running streams were chained with ice, its

green meadows mantled with snow, or bleak and desolate. Lady Montague was near her, comfortably ensconced in an easy chair, with a cushion beneath her feet and at her back.

"I see nothing particularly lovely, I am sure," returned her ladyship; "you young people seem to like it, but I for one shall not be sorry to see England again."

"I shall," replied Fred, with a heart-rending glance at Irene, who worked placidly on, her slender, jewelled fingers flashing in and out as she busily plied her crochet hook.

"Why?" she raised her head and encountered his look; "I think it is very nice, but dear me! all places are pretty much alike, I find;" very coldly, and with marked displeasure in her voice.

"There is a great difference to me; if I were alone here, for instance, I should not like it, but with you"—he had almost forgotten that any one else was present.

"Fred, my dear," said her ladyship, "go and see if the mail has arrived."

"Irene, I want to ask you something," said Lady Montague; while Geraldine, with her usual tact, seeing she was not wanted, quietly slipped away.

"I want to know if you think it right to lead poor Fred on in the way you are doing?"

"I do not know at all what you mean," she answered, haughtily.

"You must have seen his devotion to you; you must know that it is reported that you are engaged."

"I thought your ladyship far too high-minded to heed rumor," replied the girl.

"Then you do not contradict it?"

"I most certainly do not, and there is one thing I wish to say to you, Lady Montague: I feel perfectly competent to manage my own affairs, without any interference on your part, and I think Lord Monford can do the same; however, I com-

mend your excellent forethought; you have only made me more determined in my purpose."

"I shall speak to your mother," replied Lady Montague.

"Pray, do not worry mamma; she is so much better lately; I would not have you do so for worlds, and it would only give you both a great deal of unnecessary trouble."

"Come, Irene, if you will insist upon going home, the carriage is waiting," said Geraldine. "I want you to help me with my shopping."

"Good-bye, then, Lady Montague; it is needless to mention our conversation to any one," and with a slight inclination of her head she swept away.

They met Fred at the door. "If you are going anywhere, do take me. I will carry parcels of any size, if you will only give me a lift."

"Oh! you might as well let him come; he is moped to death, poor thing," said Miss Fannesley.

Geraldine good-humoredly assented, and they drove off.

"May I come this evening, Miss Fannesley?" he asked, as they stopped at the hotel.

"I have no objections," she answered; "only you must promise me not to come too early, or stay too late; try and strike a happy medium, can't you?" He could not be angry at her, and smilingly waved an adieu from the carriage window.

"Really, to-morrow, my dear," replied the baronet to an inquiry of his daughter respecting their departure; "I am sorry, but it cannot be helped; my bill comes up in the House so soon, that I shall have to make haste."

"I am very sorry, but we will come back soon, dear, shall we not?"

"I hope so," he answered.

"If you are so anxious to stay, why don't you bring the prince to a point, and enter into possession of the palazzo at Rome?" queried Monford.

"I thought you knew me well enough, by this time, to understand that there are some subjects

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which you are to let entirely alone," Geraldine replied. "You had better refer to Piccio, if you wish to hear more on the subject."

"There, children, stop and listen to me; don't be so childish. Geraldine, can you make up your mind to a very short stay in Rome?"

"I do not care to stay there at all," replied Miss Percie. "Dear, beautiful Naples, how hard it is to say good-bye!" That night, as she sat for the last time on the terrace in the mellow moonlight, she could not but wonder when she would again be there, under what circumstances she would again look upon that scene now so well impressed upon her memory. It was very still; not a sound broke the silence except the bugle call and challenge to the guard at the fortress of St. Elmo. Lulled by the ripple of the water and the rustling of the orange trees, she fell asleep, to dream, by some strange coincidence, of Reginald Clifford.

CHAPTER VIII.

"And now that the laird his exit had made,
Mistress Jean she reflected on what she had said;
Oh! for ane I'll get better, its waur I'll get ten,
I was daft to refuse the Laird o' Cockpen."

LADY NAIRN.

ITALY was left behind, a lovely dream and sweet memory, and the early April days found the Percies and Lady Montague "in town for the season." On the morning in question our heroine and her friend Miss Fannesley were sitting in the morning-room of No. 3 Park Lane. A late breakfast had just been dispensed, and the two young ladies, in the most becoming of *negligé* costumes, were ensconced, one on either side of the ornamental table in the embrasure of a sunny bay-window. Miss Fannesley's invalid mother, being not able to undergo the excitement of a season,

had remained abroad, and Lady Montague, wishing to please her granddaughter, had offered Irene a home until her parents' return, which offer was gladly accepted by that young lady. Our party had spent several weeks in Rome, Venice, and Genoa, crossed the Cornice Road, halted for a few days at Nice, and then hastened on to Paris, at which place quite a while had been spent in shopping and other amusements. I say amusements, for, although you often hear the fair sex bewailing their hard lot, and railing at shopping as one of the evils the flesh is heir to, what is dearer to the feminine mind than to enter a fascinating Parisian shop with *carte blanche* to buy whatever they like?

"I think town is very dull so far, don't you, Irene?" said Miss Percie, after a pause; "only a very few balls. Naples was much nicer."

"Will you never cease bewailing Naples?" exclaimed Miss Fannesley; "in two weeks more you would have been glad enough to leave."

"You never seem to mind anything. I don't believe you care where you are; do you, now, come?"

"Well, no; if I have plenty of good company, one place is as nice as another. There is only one spot on the face of the earth that is utterly and perfectly distasteful to me, and that is Pomfret Towers."

"But why? The house and grounds are lovely, and some of the views are finer than Clifden."

"Do you suppose I mind the views?" exclaimed Irene, bitterly. "How can you understand, you who have everything under heaven that any girl can want? You do not know how miserable I am at home, with mamma always ill, and papa forever quarrelling."

"Poor girl," said Geraldine, kissing her softly, "I am very sorry for you."

There was a knock at the door, and Fred entered. "If any of you young ladies are disposed to ride this afternoon, let me know, please, as I am

going off for the morning, and would like to see to the horses."

"I always ride with papa, so decline with great pleasure," said Geraldine.

Monford brightened perceptibly. "Then, Miss Fannesley, you will go?"

"Oh yes, certainly, if you want me."

"All right; at five, then."

"I shall be ready," she answered.

"My dear, you have met your fate undoubtedly; I never saw any one so struck in my life," said Miss Percie.

"Then I think my fate is a very hard one, with all due deference to your cousin," answered Irene, knitting her delicately pencilled brows. "I almost detest him."

"I myself do not think him worth a thought," replied Miss Percie.

"Oh! Irene, here come the Bruton girls, stupid things; let's be not at home."

Monford was punctual that afternoon, and, as

Irene did not keep him waiting, they were soon off. It was a lovely day, and Hyde Park was thronged with the beauty and fashion of the metropolis. Without the gates the tide of traffic ebbed and flowed; but here, in the very heart of the great city, was an oasis in the London desert, cool and pleasant, after the ceaseless turmoil of the streets without.

Irene was unusually pleasant, and Monford felt more certain than he had for some time, that success awaited his declaration.

"Miss Fannesley, I wonder if you will listen to something I want to ask you?" he questioned, as a turn in the road brought them to a more sequestered place.

"If it is anything worth hearing, yes," she answered, letting the reins fall upon the horse's neck, and gazing absently before her.

"You may not care to listen; it is a matter of vital importance to me, Irene; I have wanted to ask you before if you cared enough for me to

place your future in my hands, to trust your happiness to me—perhaps I have been too sudden, I should have waited."

"If you waited for a hundred years, your question would have the same answer, Lord Monford; when I do not esteem I cannot love, nay, even like."

"Then you give me no hope?"

"None whatever; my decision is final. Don't you think, Lord Monford, it was thoughtless (to call it by no harder name) in you to ask me this when I am a guest in your house? Of course I hope we shall be friends always, still——"

"You are right; I see now I should not have done it; now, however, it is over, I shall never annoy you again." Fred was intensely piqued. He had fancied that it needed but one word from him to bring the fair sex of London to his feet; he found his mistake. Miss Fannesley was not rich, her surroundings were far from pleasant, and yet she point blank refused the viscounty and

its incumbent. Did it strike him that there are better things in life than fortune and estates, that Irene's heart was not to be purchased by gold and position? The ride home was very silent on Monford's part, although Miss Fannesley made several desultory attempts at conversation. There was to be a dinner that evening at Park Lane and a dance afterwards, so Irene found Geraldine deep in the mysteries of her toilette. "I cannot decide which dress to wear—the blue is very pretty, and yet, do you know, I rather like the white; which do you say?" said Miss Percie, as her friend entered, pointing to a mass of gauze and lace upon the bed.

"Oh! white, by all means. You see now the effect of Paris—so many pretty things, it is hard to decide."

Geraldine noticed that an unwonted carmine burned in Miss Fannesley's dark cheek, making her unusually beautiful.

"I shall be nowhere to-night, beside you," said

Miss Percie, as they descended the stairs preparatory to entering the drawing-room.

"Nonsense," was the answer.

Lady Montague was affable in the extreme. Monford did not make his appearance until late, and then it was to escort the Marchioness of Dentwith to the dining-room, so Miss Fannesley experienced no embarrassment from their frequent encounters; the evening altogether was a pleasant one to both parties.

Some weeks passed quite quietly and uneventfully; there was the usual amount of balls and receptions, flirtations and gossip; the season as it advanced became gayer, and there was much to enjoy.

"That kettledrum at Lady Kingsley's this afternoon could be dispensed with I think, don't you?" said Irene, as the two ladies lingered over their late breakfast.

"By no means, dear; grandmamma would despair if we gave that up; Lady Kingsley is Sir

Reginald Clifford's aunt, you know," replied Miss Percie, refilling her cup from the urn before her.

"No, really, then we ought to be happy," and Irene stooped to pick up the morning's paper beside her.

The young ladies, notwithstanding they grumbled a little, were quite ready when the landau drove to the door. Lady Kingsley's rooms were crowded, and Geraldine and her friend experienced some difficulty in reaching their hostess's side.

"My dear Miss Percie, I am so glad to see you," she exclaimed, clasping our heroine's hand. "I have heard so much about you from the boys, and I have such a piece of news for you; you can form no idea what a surprise it is to us, dear Reggie has been so quiet about it, and do you know, my dear, he is actually engaged to be married?"

Had a thunderbolt fallen at her feet Miss Percie would not have been more startled. Reginald Clifford engaged to be married! The thing was preposterous—out of the question. She had always

looked upon the baronet as in some way connected with herself, her personal property. It could not be that she loved him—what nonsense! he was nothing to her. It was her own fault if he had left her; she had been unpardonably rude to him at Naples, and it was no wonder he was angry. Stop, she must think no further, she certainly did not love him, and yet—and yet—how silly she was; what were they saying to her about Clifden? Oh, yes! it was that insufferably shy Lord Gartmere, a *protégé* of Sir Reginald. She tried to answer properly, and as though she were interested, but it was of no use; she was intensely mortified to find herself calling him Sir Reginald, and telling him that Clifden commanded an unusually fine view of the Bay of Naples. As they were leaving, she drew near Lady Kingsley.

"My child, the rooms are too warm for you, you are very pale," she said kindly.

"Oh! it is nothing, really, your ladyship," replied Geraldine, too thoroughly miserable to care

what she said. "When you write to your nephew, please tell him, with my kindest regards, that I wish him great happiness, and I hope soon to be able to congratulate him in person."

"Certainly, dear, with great pleasure; now good-bye, and do take good care of youself, won't you?"

Miss Percie was silent all the way home, no endeavors of Lady Montague's were successful, and at last they abandoned her to herself, and left her to the enjoyment of her own thoughts, which were far from pleasant ones. She had been perfectly blind before, not to know what she had done. Of course, woman-like, now that some one else had taken what might have been hers, she had wrought herself up almost to a frenzy.

"You are very quiet, not to say cross. What *is* the matter with you, Gerry?" queried Fred, at dinner.

"Nothing; why need you be forever bothering?" she answered, turning away her head to hide the tears in her eyes.

"What have you, grandmamma? Who is your letter from?" continued Monford.

"My letter? Oh! Reginald Clifford; he says, as he is about to return home to Deergrove, he wishes, as I know what suits him, that I would see to the arrangements. I suppose, as they say, he is to marry; his wife is coming with him." Geraldine could stand it no longer; this was too much for her forbearance, and rising hastily she left the room, too much blinded by her tears to heed the questioning looks given her by her relatives. Once in her own apartment, she gave way completely, and, throwing herself upon the sofa, burst into a perfect passion of weeping. And yet she tried to make herself believe that she did not care for Clifford, that she would feel just as badly if any one else of her acquaintance was about to marry. Her sobs subsided at last; they must not suspect below stairs what was the matter; she would take good care of that. Her indomitable pride had placed a barrier about her

which would serve her now; so she descended to the drawing-room.

Irene met her on the stairway. "You are certainly not going down again now; why, it is time to dress for the opera."

"I had almost forgotten we were going," replied Miss Percie listlessly, hoping that her red eyes escaped her friend's scrutiny.

Miss Fannesley made no answer. It was odd that Geraldine should have forgotten what she had wished for so long, namely, Patti as Leonore. What could induce her to act so strangely then? Irene wondered if the rumors concerning Reginald Clifford could have affected her to such an extent.

"Handsome girl that, Jack; any bright and particularly star?" lisped a young exquisite in the stalls to his friend.

"Very fine girl," replied the gentleman addressed as Jack, raising his glass to the Montague's box.

"That is the young lady who is creating such a

sensation, a great heiress, and all that sort of thing. I don't know her myself, but hear of her quite often through Harding of ours, who was pretty hard hit in that quarter."

Geraldine was looking remarkably well that night, but there was a dreamy far-away look in her eyes. Patti might as well have been any one else, for all the attention our heroine gave to her exquisite rendering of Il Trovatore. Her thoughts had flown back to the days at Gresham Abbey, when she first met Clifford; back to the scene in the drawing-room; his words were forever ringing in her ears. Was it possible that he had then suspected she cared for Audley, and wished in some way to save her from the humiliation of being jilted by such a man? This idea had never dawned upon her before; she was half tempted to go home at once, and pen a letter to Clifford which should bring him to her feet. Then there would be a scene, of course, which would end in a reconciliation; her father would bless them both.

The Clifden bells were chiming merrily in her ears, when she was roused rudely from her reverie by the descent of the green curtain and Lady Montague motioning to her to come.

"Well, Gerry, how did you like it?" queried Monford as he escorted her to the carriage.

"Oh! very well, at least all I heard of it," she replied.

"All you heard of it! pray, where were your thoughts?"

"A long way off," with a sigh and a compression of the lips.

She is too much upset even to be rude, thought Monford. "The ball will be a dreadful pull for you; suppose we go home," said he kindly.

"I don't know what is the matter with you all," she replied, angry that her momentary weakness should have been discovered. "I am perfectly well, I assure you, and you shall not have cause to complain of my behavior again."

She kept her word. Never before had she been

so bright and animated, or appeared to better advantage. Those who praised her wit and beauty that night, little knew how much sorrow was hidden away beneath that gay exterior, what a breaking heart disguised itself in smiles.

The next day, and for several succeeding days, Miss Percie kept up her spirits wonderfully. At last the reaction came; she was gloomy and morose, and proved no pleasant addition to the party. Lady Montague had, however, the good sense to let matters take their course.

Fortunately for all parties concerned, in the early part of May a letter arrived from Sir Roger, desiring his daughter to join him in Paris. Geraldine was only too happy for any change; so, as soon as a suitable escort could be found, Miss Percie left for the Continent.

CHAPTER IX.

"As fair art thou, my bonny lass,
So deep in love am I;
And I will love thee still, my love,
Though a' the seas gang dry."

ROBERT BURNS.

WE bade farewell to the Cliffords as they were leaving Rome, and I think it now incumbent upon me, as the humble historian of the family, to return to them again.

From Rome, Reginald and his brother proceeded by easy stages to Cairo, which place they found delightfully suitable for a rendezvous. There were many of their friends also at the hotel, and Audley fast recovered his spirits amid such genial surroundings. It was upon Reginald the blow fell heaviest. He was far away from all the world held dear to him; the guileless object upon whom the

younger brother vented his ill humor. Not a very enviable position, you say. Perhaps not, for Audley could not long remain in the state his wife's death had left him. His nature was far too shallow to long retain any impression, and little by little the old domineering spirit asserted itself. Mildred had been with him for such a short time, he reasoned within himself, that it was silly to grieve so much for her; he would try and be more cheerful. He succeeded admirably, and no excursion was considered complete without one whose ready wit made him such a desirable companion.

"I really think, Reggie, I might go out a little now," said Audley, one bright May morning, as they stood on the hotel steps together; "that ball at the consul's to-night!"

"If you feel in the mood for it, you certainly can," replied Reginald, a little sarcastically.

He did not approve of his brother's behavior in the least. Audley's ideas were not like his own, but then he was older, and boys would be boys.

A little later he encountered his brother walking leisurely along in company with a Miss Ellingsworth, the acknowledged belle among the British colony of Cairo. They were laughing immoderately at something, and Audley was holding an open letter in his hand.

"You're a sly one, Reggie, coming here under pretext of taking care of me, and sending home word you were engaged."

"I don't know what you mean, I am sure," replied the baronet, with some displeasure in his voice.

"Tell Sir Reginald, Mr. Clifford," said his fair companion, standing out of the glare of the street and drawing her pongee parasol closer down over her face.

"Behold, then, an extract from Aunt Kingsley's letter," and Audley read—

"I was quite fortunate in securing Miss Percie for the kettledrum; she is a nice girl, though rather too haughty; she sent her kindest regards

to Reginald, wishes him great happiness, and hopes to be soon able to congratulate him in person."

Reginald gasped for breath, and clutched the rail to steady himself. Could that message from Geraldine be possibly construed into a summons for him to come to her? No, the thing was out of the question.

"How did this absurd report become circulated?" queried the baronet, the cloud deepening upon his brow.

"The way all reports do, I supposed," replied Audley, making a move to continue his walk.

"Something generally gives rise to a rumor," said Clifford. Audley was provokingly silent, although his face bore a remarkably I-could-tell-you-if-I-wanted-to expression. Miss Ellingsworth wished the baronet good-morning, and they continued their walk. Reginald watched them until they disappeared, then strolled down the street in the direction they had taken. There were several

letters for him at the Poste Restante, one with a black seal and border in a strange handwriting. He opened it rather tremulously; no very bad news after all, merely from a distant cousin of his, who had written to remind him of a promise he had made her some time before, of visiting her on his return home. "Heaven knows when that will be," he murmured sadly, thinking of the letter he had sent Lady Montague a few weeks before. "Poor old Deergrove, I wonder when I shall see you again."

"Well, old boy, what's the matter now?" queried Audley, laying a detaining hand upon his brother's shoulder.

"Nothing that I know of," in rather a constrained voice.

"Come now, I'll tell you a joke. I thought I'd get a rise out of Aunt Kingsley; so I wrote in my last that I thought you must be engaged, you were so different."

"A kind and brotherly thing to do, and I thank

you," replied the baronet, his temper rising; "the next time you take a rise, as you are pleased to term it, out of Lady Kingsley, pray take no liberties with my name."

"There, don't mind so much; there is no harm done, only I would give a pony to see Miss Percie's face when aunt told her the news." This was the first time Miss Percie's name had been mentioned between the brothers.

"You shall not mention Miss Percie in that way in my presence, and the less you say on that subject the better, after what occurred between you."

Audley winced, but could not help remarking, dryly, "By Jove, you take a wonderful interest in the heiress."

Had he betrayed the secret he guarded so carefully? Did his brother suspect the passionate adoration Geraldine had inspired in his breast? It was impossible to tell—Audley's face was quite calm.

"I will allow no lady's name to be spoken in that manner before me."

Audley gave a knowing smile. "You had better go home and claim your bride. She is twenty-one, or rather will be in September, and will no doubt accept your hand rather than dwell in single blessedness."

By a mighty effort Reginald conquered the inclination to collar his brother for his impertinence. Turning on his heel, he strode hastily away, a mighty tumult of passion raging in his breast. What must Geraldine think of him? How she must despise him for forgetting her so soon! Why must Audley continually come between them? There was no law forbidding his return to England; he would go. To see her once more, even though he could not speak with her, would be something. Would his patience never be rewarded, would she never summon him to her side? Audley was rather surprised at his brother's leaving him so suddenly. Never but twice in his life

had he seen him angry; then it had been, as he well knew, righteous indignation. He had fancied once or twice before that he cared for Miss Percie, but he did not think of Reginald, strangely enough, in connection with anything more than a passing fancy. He waited for some time, hoping his brother might return; but hour after hour passed, and no sign of him. At last, as evening was closing in, he returned to the hotel, to find the baronet upon the veranda busily reading a recently arrived copy of the London Times.. He was very pleasant, and seemed to have entirely recovered his good humor.

"How awfully handsome your brother is, Mr. Clifford," several young ladies had said to him that day. Strange he had never noticed it before! Clifford was handsome, and there was a pleased expression upon his face that became him well.

"Who is married or dead, and what's been going on at home lately?" queried Audley, as soon as he came within hailing distance of his

brother. "Oh! letters," seeing that he held several in his hand; "Who is your correspondent?"

"Lady Montague," very graciously, but as though he wished to be let alone; and this is what pleased him so much; hard-hearted monster, we glance at the conclusion of her ladyship's letter.

"Geraldine sends her congratulations" (how very eager she was to have him know she wished him happiness). "The dear child is quite ill, I think, and very cross; however, the season may have tired her, she has been so gay.. We enjoyed ourselves very much at your aunt's kettledrum. Miss Percie, I am afraid, made a very unfavorable impression, as she was tired out from the night before; so tell your aunt, when you see her, that she is not always that way." Then some items of home news. So Geraldine had been stupid at the kettledrum; strange, she was generally anything else. Putting this and that together, was it conceited in him to think that his rumored engagement

made any difference to her? If it did—silly fool that he was—he would bless Audley forever. How rude she had been to him at Naples! Could he forgive her? Stay! what was that a sign of? he was not well versed enough in love-making to know. "It means she doesn't wish me to have anything to do with her," he added, bringing his golden dream to a sudden termination, and springing up with alacrity.

"Are you for the consul's ball to-night?" said Audley.

"No, my boy, this time to-morrow I shall be *en route* for Paris, so I shall be busy."

"And I supposed to go with you," said Audley, as he thought with a pang of Miss Ellingsworth, and a vision of flaxen curls, tulle, and pongee parasols flitted before his mind's eye.

"You are supposed to please yourself," replied Reginald. Audley did please himself, and the next morning found Reginald on his homeward way, while his brother waved him an adieu. The time

consumed in going from Cairo to the gay capital seemed interminable to the baronet, but Paris was reached at last, and it was with a feeling of genuine pleasure that he gazed from the windows of the Hotel Bristol, upon the Place Vendome, and the Rue de la Paix. Paris was filled to overflowing with English tourists—at the Louvre, at Versailles, in the Tuileries Gardens—go where you would, you would encounter them. Clifford was walking leisurely along the Rue de Rivoli on the morning after his arrival, encountering many friends. He was just turning into the Place du Palais Royal, when a friendly voice accosted him by name, and, turning, he found himself addressed by Sir Roger Percie.

"I am glad to see you, Clifford; let me see, we haven't met since——"

"Last winter at Naples," said Reginald, rather stiffly.

"I only saw you once then, however; we shall

hope to see more of you now. Where are you to be found?"

"At the Bristol. I am only here for a few days, being 'homeward bound.'"

"Curious! we are at the same hotel. Dine with us this evening, can't you? We shall be quite alone."

"You are very kind, but I shall not be able to do so this evening," replied Reginald, wishing all the time to accept.

"I am sorry. I shall see you again, though, to-day, I hope. Good-morning; I see Gerry is coming."

Reginald bowed and turned away; he could not trust himself to meet *her* yet.

"Is this the way you treat old friends, Sir Reginald?"

How well he knew every intonation of that voice; how often he had heard it in his dreams; and she was speaking to him now! His heart beat faster; he raised his hat. "I am very much pleased to

meet you again," calmly. How lovely she looked! not in the least ill.

"Papa says you will not dine with us to-night; why is that?"

"I can hardly think my presence will be agreeable to Miss Percie," he answered, so low that no one heard but her. Some friends joined them, and with another profound bow Clifford turned away.

CHAPTER X.

"'I have kept, as others have, the iron rule of womanly reserve.'
Ending, she was pale; the last words, haughtily said, were tremulous.
This palfry pranced in harness, arched her neck,
And only by the foam upon the bit you saw she champed against it."
MRS. BROWNING.

MISS PERCIE was rather preoccupied all the morning; she was dwelling on her meeting with Clifford after their long separation. He was much improved, far superior to any one she had met in

all her wanderings. However, she had made the first overtures towards their old familiar intercourse, he had repulsed them; now things must take their course.

Our heroine was piqued, nay even a little sorrowful, at the point-blank refusal she had met; never before had anything annoyed her so much.

Ah! Geraldine, is this the cold indifference with which your friend was to be treated? is this the contempt you intend to show him you feel for him? Sir Roger, according to usual custom, secured seats for the opera that evening, and his daughter, much against her inclination, was forced to accompany him.

Reginald, meanwhile, in the reading-room of the Bristol, was vainly endeavoring to read intelligently the columns of the morning's Galiganni. It was no use; the object of his affections haunted him everywhere. What an unmitigated ass he had been not to accept Sir Roger's invitation for the evening! How much improved (if that were

possible) Geraldine was! Tiring at last of his own thoughts, the baronet tossed aside his paper, and strolled out for his evening walk on the boulevards. He at length retraced his steps and found himself on the spot of his morning's encounter. How plainly he saw Miss Percie! how that spot would be held forever sacred on her account! As it was late, he turned homewards, and reached his rooms just as the carriage containing our heroine drew up before the door. She descended, and all Reginald could distinguish was the gleam of a golden head in the lamplight, and the folds of her opera cloak drawn closely about her. Miss Percie was quite flushed with excitement. Their box had been the centre of attraction, and Miss Percie's smiles and bows were things to be longed for by the unhappy few who did not possess the priceless boon of her acquaintance; and yet there was something wanting in her enjoyment, because of the absence of one whose coming was so ardently wished for. Every time the door opened or a step

sounded in the corridor outside, Geraldine had started, nervously, with a vague longing, which she did not care to acknowledge even to herself, that Reginald might repent, might forget his silly threat, and come. But the evening passed, and he did not. Slowly the bitter truth dawned upon her: he had forgotten what she had once been to him, how he *had* loved her; and then she made a solemn vow, never, by word, look, or deed, should any one know what Clifford was to her. The secret should be locked as securely away in her soul, as if the key were hidden in the depths of ocean.

The next morning, as our hero was quietly eating his luncheon in the dining-room of a café, he became conscious of an unusual stir. Looking in the direction of the door, he perceived Miss Percie and her father entering, the former rather pale, which was not unbecoming, and dressed in such faultless taste that it was no wonder she attracted attention. Now, if my heroine had been other than an English woman, I should not be so par-

ticular to mention her taste in dress so often, but, belonging to a race by whom dress is not generally carried to perfection, to say the least of it, I feel it incumbent upon me to speak. Their table being near him, our hero had plenty of time for observation; he decided that the object of his affections looked heartily bored, and her greeting was far more cold than occasion warranted; she merely returned a cold, very cold, bow to his pleasant morning salutation. Sir Roger was profuse in his expressions of pleasure at having such a pleasant neighbor. "Now we must see more of you," concluded Mr. Percie.

"You are very kind," replied Clifford, "nothing would give me more pleasure; unfortunately my stay is likely to be limited, as affairs in England demand my time. However, if I have any leisure before I leave, I shall remember your kindness." Clifford glanced curiously at Miss Percie to see if she seemed affected by the news of his departure;

no, she was demurely helping herself to sugar, with a look of supreme indifference upon her face.

"Did you enjoy yourself last evening?" interrogated Clifford, vainly endeavoring to think of something extremely witty to say.

"Yes, pretty well; but I am rather tired of Faust."

"Which is a practical illustration of the fact that one *can* have too much of a good thing."

A very cold smile. "Yes; papa, may I trouble you for the cream?"

Clifford bowed, wished them a very good morning, and sauntered away. Ass that he was, to waste a thought upon a girl who cared not whether he were alive or dead, who heeded him as little as the dust beneath her feet! And this was her reward to him for his unselfish devotion. Should he be patient yet a little while, or should he quit Paris, renounce now and forever all claims to happiness, and bid Miss Percie adieu? Common sense dictated the latter course, but his heart

would not allow him to think of such a thing for a moment; so he determined to wait and hope. The morning passed quickly enough in writing letters to Audley and the old house-keeper at Deergrove Park. As soon as this occupation had been concluded, he found himself on the way to the Bois; encountering Sir Roger Percie near the Arc de l'Etoile.

"Glad to see you; really, you are the most unsocial fellow I ever saw; why don't you come oftener?"

"You are too kind, Sir Roger; nothing would give me greater pleasure, but I think it only fair consideration to you, to tell you, that I honestly do not think my presence is agreeable to your daughter; the marked displeasure with which she receives all my friendly overtures has strengthened me in my opinion."

"Nonsense! we are far too old friends to allow a girl of one-and-twenty to come between us. Come, be sensible; my daughter is not capricious;

I know you are mistaken; don't let it cause you any uneasiness."

A sudden resolution took possession of our hero; he would tell all to Sir Roger, and trust in the help of such a powerful ally to bring his unhappy love affair to a happy conclusion. Sir Roger listened without comment, as Clifford told him how fondly he had loved Geraldine.

"You're a capital fellow, and I know no one to whom I would more willingly give my child. Here is my hand, my boy, and I wish you success. For me to speak to her would, I know, make an end of everything; let things take their course. I trust you will never have cause to regret having told me this;—but stop! what was this about an engagement?"

"That was merely an idle rumor, started by some one to perplex and annoy me. Pray, put no faith in such reports. I shall never love but one person, and that person is Miss Percie."

Sir Roger gazed with admiration into the

frank handsome face before him. How Clifford brightened when he spoke of Geraldine! Well, it was too bad; she was a perverse, foolish child. He wished that everything might come right, kind-hearted man that he was, but he resolved that not one word on the subject should pass between them. When they met, that evening, at dinner, he merely said, "Did you enjoy yourself at the Fannesleys', my love?"

"Yes, papa, very much indeed, thanks; and I am so glad I went, poor Lady Fannesley is so very ill."

"Ah! indeed, sorry to hear it. Poor thing! she has lasted a long while. Why, Gerry, my love, as far as I can remember she was dying ten years ago."

Miss Percie made no answer, merely changed her position.

"Now what an absurd thing rumor is! I had quite a long walk with Clifford to-day. Asked him, of course, about his engagement, and it

comes out it is merely a report, no truth in it whatever; he seems very much in love, though." The baronet glanced at his daughter. She had schooled herself too well to allow any change to come over her features; her face wore an extremely haughty expression, which her father knew to portend a coming storm.

"I am sorry I offered him my congratulations then."

"Oh no! though *you* might have said something he liked better." There was hidden meaning in his tones, but no face could have worn a more innocent expression, as he held the rare old wine between himself and the light, and tossed it off at a swallow.

"You seem strangely interested in Reginald Clifford lately," replied Miss Percie, ready to shake herself because her voice would linger on the name.

"Oh! he's nice enough; do give us some

music," with great alacrity, fearing he might expose Riginald's confidence.

Miss Percie possessed a sweet voice. Though not having great compass, it was particularly adapted to the style of music she affected—ballads, and simple little songs such as her father loved. To-night she was in a strangely softened mood. As she took her place at the piano, before she commenced, her father said, in a very unpremeditated manner: "Gerry, why don't you be more civil to Clifford? you seem to have taken a mutual dislike to each other."

Miss Percie made no reply, merely selected Arthur Sullivan's "Oh! Sweet and Fair," and, dashing off a prelude, she commenced, her voice gaining strength and sweetness as she proceeded, although it faltered over the last verse, and when she concluded her eyes were full of tears; all because she hated and despised Reginald Clifford so very much. Oh yes! it was really dreadful; a mutual dislike, indeed!

Visitors dropped in later—a French duke, a count, and a German baron, several stray English lordlings, and a few bright-faced pretty girls—it being the Percies' reception evening. Miss Fannesly had consented to be there, and came attended by a distant connection of the Percies who acted as *chaperone* on such occasions. At last, as the evening was nearly over, the door of the *salon* opened to admit Reginald Clifford, resplendent in his evening dress, with a fragrant tea-rose in his button-hole. How very noble and handsome he looked, towering above the others, who dwarfed into insignificance beside him. A meek little Italian, to whom no one was paying the least attention, was thundering a deafening obligato upon the piano. Miss Percie, as usual the centre of attraction, was surrounded by a *coterie* of admirers; several mild flirtations were going on all around, the only person disengaged being Miss Fannesley, who was standing by the window gazing into the gay street without;

even Sir Roger was gravely discussing French politics with a decorated French diplomat. So Clifford immediately went to Miss Fannesley. She turned eagerly, and a delicate carmine suffused her olive cheek.

"This is indeed a surprise; I had no idea of meeting you here to-night."

"We are mutually pleased then," he replied, drawing aside the heavy curtain. "How is Lady Fannesley?"

"Much better, thanks, to-night; this morning she was very ill again."

They were joined at this moment by Lord Gartmere, who, being as usual very shy, sought his protector's side. Miss Fannesley was very kind to him, set him completely at his ease, and, when Reginald withdrew, he left him deep in a game of whist, with Irene for partner. Clifford was wearying of Paris, tired of the bustle and stir of the busy city, longing for the quiet of Deergrove. That night he determined to bid farewell to the Percies,

and return to England with the great longing of his soul unsatisfied, and a dreary blank in his heart.

No sooner said than done. The valet was electrified at receiving orders to be ready to leave on the morrow at midday for Calais. His master had become very freakish of late. Ah, well! perhaps he was in love, and Pigot, who had himself experienced this sensation, made ready with a woe-begone face, for were there not several fair charmers among the abigails at the Bristol, who were what Alexander had sighed for—new worlds to conquer? Mr. Pigot comforted himself with the philosophic reflection, however, that there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out. Now came the hardest part of all, bidding adieu to Miss Percie; but this was accomplished in a very easy manner, inasmuch as that young lady did not seem in the least surprised, although she was in reality burning with curiosity.

"I hope you will have a pleasant journey," said

Sir Roger. "I am sure we wish you all sorts of pleasant things; don't we, my dear?" But "my dear" was obstinately silent, to all appearances too much engrossed in the book she held in her hand to heed what was passing about her.

Sir Roger clasped his hand warmly, Miss Percie bowed, and he was off; leaving our heroine almost on the verge of tears, with nothing but her own obstinacy to thank for making her one of the most unhappy girls alive.

"Strange that you should dislike that poor man so much," said the baronet, as Clifford drove from the door.

"I am sure I don't know what you mean, papa; he does well enough," replied Miss Percie, gazing, as her father supposed, idly into the street, though in reality watching the carriage, with Pigot's consequential form upon the box, disappear. She turned away with a weary sigh.

"Why don't we go home to Clifden, papa, and rest for a little while?"

The baronet was astounded. "To Clifden! Why, certainly, my darling, if you wish it."

"Yes, I do very, very much. Oh, papa! how kind you are;" and, throwing her arms about his neck, she burst into tears.

"There, how silly and ridiculous I am! You see, papa, we have been away from Clifden for so long that I really almost forget how it looks."

Miss Fannesley at this moment entered, with the intelligence that Lord Gartmere had called that morning, and that Lady Fannesley was ordered by her physician to try the baths at Kissingen, and they were to leave the first of next week. Then Miss Percie had her item of news to communicate; and they talked on for some time about nothing under heaven, as young ladies will do now and then.

"How well Sir Reginald looked last evening, did he not?" queried Irene.

"I do believe you and papa are in league against me; I don't know whether he did or not, I never

noticed." Ah! Geraldine, may that little fiction be overlooked in your account.

"How odd! I saw you staring at him very hard, when we stood talking together in the window."

"Nonsense! I was looking at—at—" yes, hesitate, Geraldine Percie; you know that every feature of that handsome face is impressed so firmly upon your mind, that you need no photograph by which to remember Reginald Clifford.

Irene smiled—a sad smile; she knew *now* what had changed her friend lately, and made her so absent-minded and peculiar.

"Ah! Gerry, Gerry, I know your secret; you love Reginald Clifford, though you will not acknowledge it even to yourself."

Miss Percie rose, her cheeks blazing with passion.

"Irene Fannesley, have I ever given you reason by word or deed to lead you to such a conclusion? how can you say such things to me, how dare you? I in love with Reginald Clifford! I despise him—

no, that does not satisfy? Then I hate him. You smile? must I, can I say more?"

"No, since every word you say strengthens my convictions: when every one knows how he fairly worships the ground you tread on."

"Do you really think he does?" in a tone which quite belied her previous statement. "Oh no, Irene, he doesn't; I am sure of *that*."

"Very well; I know better; that is all."

Miss Percie took three or four hasty turns up and down the room. Miss Fannesley then concluded it was time for her to go; so she went.

"He worships the ground you tread on;" the words rang in Geraldine's ears. Did he really care for her? She loved him, she was sure; oh! why had he gone? If she could only see him again! "I do love you, oh Reginald! indeed I do," she murmured, dashing the tears from her dark eyes. But then came the torturing thought that he was gone; she might never see him again. Oh! what a tempest-tossed sea her life was becom-

ing; would she ever be the gay, light-hearted girl again, who had danced so happily at the birthday ball at Gresham three years ago, who had wandered through the green alleys of Clifden, with Audley, as careless of coming trouble as the birds who sang so blithely about them? Well, she was indeed changed, and unwittingly the closing lines of one of her favorite poems occurred to her—

"But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me."

CHAPTER XI.

"Be still, sad heart! and cease repining;
Behind the clouds is the sun still shining.
Thy fate is the common fate of all;
Into each life some rain must fall,
Some days must be dark and dreary."

HENRY W. LONGFELLOW.

MAY, in England, is usually the sunniest and pleasantest of months. This time, however, must have been an exception, for the last days of spring

were a continuation of rain and storm. Reginald Clifford, alone at Deergrove, found it very monotonous. It was a fine old place, this his home; many generations of Cliffords had been housed beneath its roof, and enjoyed the keen sports of the chase in its well-stocked park. The silent glades had once echoed the huntsman's clanging horn and shrill tally-ho, and the turf had been trampled and torn by the hoofs of many a thoroughbred ridden by some of the noblest in the land, for kings and princes had often lodged at Deergrove Park, and many a minstrel had told his tale of love, and sung of the noble deeds of knight and crusader, beside the great hall fireplace, where Reginald Clifford, surrounded by his dogs, spent most of his time. Nearly every day the rain ceased for a time, and then the baronet, mounted on his superb Arabian steed Saladin, and accompanied by his favorite mastiff, might be seen galloping down the avenue, out through the Park gates, along the high-road to the village. Lady Montague, with

stray visions of her granddaughter's becoming one day mistress of this magnificent estate, had succeeded admirably in her work, and a wonderful transformation had been effected in the suite of apartments dedicated to the use of the lord of the manor. There was nothing startling, everything being in exquisite taste, and all assisting in the harmonious whole. No one but the housekeeper (who was the presiding genius of the place, and still persisted in calling the tall baronet Master Reginald) ever penetrated into the mysteries of the closed part of the house. Clifford's apartments were contained in the wing of the mansion, the whole of the main building being tenanted by rats, although some persons said defunct Cliffords promenaded among the great rambling rooms, and down the mysterious corridors. Be that as it may, Deergrove, in its present empty condition, was no lively place in such dreary weather. In vain did the factotum, with tears in her eyes, importune Clifford to make the tour of the closed

state apartments, so ghostly in their brown holland coverings, with the portraits of Cliffords, from the shepherd lord down, glowering from the walls. Reginald was firm; never would he enter the innermost recesses of his mansion until he delivered up the keys of the castle to Lady Clifford. "And may that be soon, sir," said Mrs. Merton, with some severity, "for it's a crying shame for all them paintings, and stattys, and all that fine furniture to be going to destruction, and no one but me to care; not to mention them jewels, as I do declare keep me awake nights a thinkin' what'll become of them. Them diamonds, oh Master Reginald! do excuse a poor foolish old woman, but them diamonds was just too lovely, and to think they'll never see the light again."

"There, Merton, don't be silly, that's a good creature. I hope the diamonds will be worn many times, and that you will live to see it too. Come now, let me see those accounts from the upholsterers, and tell Jarvis, if he comes in at four, I will

speak with him about the rents. By the by, do you know anything about those people who have taken the mill cottage?"

"Oh! yes, sir; they are good kindly people, and I do tell Mr. Jarvis it seems a sin and a shame to press them so for their rent, when the mother is so weakly like, and one of the children being down. You see, sir, they are all of them homesick. They are from Northumberland; the father was one of the under-gardeners at Sir Roger Percie's." Reginald started.

"Percie's, did you say, Merton? See that the one who is ill has everything that is necessary; I shall go down there some time either to-day or to-morrow. In the mean while attend to all I say."

"Yes, indeed, I will, sir. I thank you kindly too. Only don't go down there, please; the mother is down with fever, and one of the children is very bad. I'll send down, though, sir, and see." Mrs. Merton was as good as her word, and not a day passed for several weeks but some present of

flowers or fruit arrived from Sir Reginald. The little girl, who was the first one taken ill, lingered for two or three weeks after the fever left her, but her constitution was too much shattered to rally, and one lovely June evening, as Clifford was smoking his cigar on the terrace, Mrs. Merton came sobbing towards him.

"Oh! Master Reggie dear, the poor child is gone; she was a sweet lamb, and oh, my dear, with her last breath she blessed the kind getleman who had given her so much. 'I am very poor, Mrs. Merton,' says she, 'but tell him I'll pray for him always; and give him this,' says she. 'It ain't much, but it's all I've got, and my young lady way up in the dear North country gave it to me three years ago when she went away. I loved her so, Mrs. Merton, and I loved this too.' And she took and kissed it and gave it to me; and she says, 'Now kiss me, Mrs. Merton; you'll tell the kind gentleman, and I've told Bobbie and Jim, and they're going to be good boys, and love him, 'cause

I want them to.' Poor lamb, poor lamb!" sobbed the old woman.

The tears stood in Reginald's eyes, strong man that he was, after Mrs. Merton's recital, and his fingers trembled so that he could with difficulty untie the string of the flat, clumsily put up little parcel in his hand. When at last the wrapping was removed, he could scarcely repress a cry of surprise, as he beheld the little dead girl's legacy to him. And why? It was merely one of those large, illuminated text cards one sees in the possession of nearly every Sabbath-school scholar in the land, but on the back, written in a pointed feminine hand, were the words, "To my good little Mollie, with the best love of her affectionate teacher and friend Geraldine Percie."

It was, indeed, a strange coincidence. How he should prize that, not so much on account of the childish love which had remembered him even in death, but for the sake of the handwriting on the back.

"Mrs. Merton," said he, "tell this little girl's mother that nothing under heaven could have made me happier than Mollie's legacy—I shall value it highly, as one of the dearest treasures in my possession; and that Bobbie and Jim, whoever they may be, shall never want for anything while I live."

Mrs. Merton nodded, and departed, still weeping profusely, and Reginald entered his study, with the card in his hand. Drawing a curiously wrought key from the bunch before him, he fitted it into the lock of an inlaid Indian cabinet, and, placing the text in silver paper, carefully laid it away beside a half-worn lady's glove, and a faded bunch of heart's-ease. Then, as if his thoughts were too much for him, he sized his hat, and, whistling to his dogs, started for a ramble across the fields in the sweet summer twilight.

How could people remain in town, when the country was so gloriously beautiful that every moment made one glad to be alive? The tide of

fashion was flowing fiercely now. No doubt every available person would be at his Aunt Lady Kingsley's, to-night, for the ball.

"I am glad enough I did not go," he mused; "let me see; did she say the Percies are at home? I wonder if they are;" here he commenced switching viciously with the stick he carried, at the wild flowers, heavy with evening dew, through which he was walking. "I wish I could ever think of anything besides that girl," he mused. "Was there ever such an unhappy fellow as I am? Dear! dear!" Still he walked on, on, until the pale moon stole silently out, and the many stars shone pityingly down upon him. How much further he would have gone will never be known, as at this juncture a tall figure crossed his path, and a voice exclaimed, "Well, old boy, I've come!" and almost before he knew it he had grasped Audley's hand, and they were retracing their steps towards the house.

"I should think you would be moped to death

in that great barn all alone, and such beastly weather as we have been having too."

"I have been rather solitary, but now you are come it will be more lively."

"Me! oh! pray, don't count on me; I am a mere bird of passage; to-morrow I may be off again."

"Where do you hail from now?" queried Clifford, whistling shrilly to a retriever, who had strayed from his side in hot pursuit of a hare.

"Now? From town, of course. I heard you were rusticating here, and, fearing you might be eloping with Merton, or doing something else rash, I thought I would take a run down and see you."

"Very kind of you indeed, quite brotherly. How is Miss Ellingsworth?"

"Why, did being brotherly put you in mind of her? She is well, and, before many moons have waned, will be Mrs. Audley Clifford, if all goes

well." Reginald did not speak, as his brother evidently expected him to do.

"Why don't you speak, old boy?"

"What is there for me to say? You do not need my congratulations. The most appropriate thing to wish you, I suppose, is many happy returns," said Reginald, calmly.

"Certainly, as it is the birthday of my happiness," retorted Audley, in no wise disconcerted.

That night, as Reginald sat alone in his room, he could not but wonder why all the brightness should belong to Audley's life, all the vague unsatisfied longing to his. "If I were sure that Geraldine Percie loved me, I would not care what happened." But that sweet assurance was not vouchsafed him yet; still a little while he must be patient. Some time passed; our hero consoled himself every day by a peep at the text, until the writing was so firmly impressed upon his mind that he saw it in everything. The very birds seemed to sing "from her affectionate teacher and

friend Geraldine Percie," the books in the library took the same title. He was really quite relieved when Audley, after two days of country life, voted it a bore, and returned to town. At last, one evening, Reginald's long months of patient waiting were rewarded by the receipt of an envelope, embellished with a dainty blue and silver cipher, and addressed in a feminine hand to Reginald Clifford, Bart., Deergrove Park, Sussex.

The note within ran as follows:—

CLIFDEN MANOR, June 12th, 18—

DEAR SIR REGINALD:

Papa is very anxious for you to fulfil the promise you made him in Paris, of visiting us as soon as we returned. I write to say that Thursday we shall expect you without fail. I suppose my town friends vote me insane, but the country looks so lovely that I cannot tear myself away. We are quite alone, with the exception of grandmamma; so I hope the scenery will in some

measure compensate for the excessively stupid society you will subject yourself to. If your good nature can stand the severe test we are imposing upon it, I hope we shall see you; if not, we shall have to be satisfied.

Sincerely your friend,

GERALDINE PERCIE.

Never was royal pardon received with greater joy by doomed criminal. Not even the thought of Lady Montague's presence marred the exquisite happiness of the moment. This was Monday; there were therefore two, nay three, whole days of suspense, and then—what bliss unutterable awaited him! The first thing to be done was to reply to this weighty epistle. We will not say how many sheets of crested note paper were used before an answer, that was neither too cool nor too gushing, was penned. Nothing would do but he must ride Saladin himself to the village, and see the document well on its way. Verily, it takes

a wise man to play the fool! This safely accomplished, he astonished and delighted Mrs. Merton by demanding the keys of the house and going over it with her. So one day was disposed of. The next morning he decided to go to town for a day or two; so he bade farewell to Mrs. Merton, and with Pigot, supremely happy in the rumble, he set off. Where now were all his repinings, his heavy-heartedness? Gone—flown to the four winds—and the jolliest fellow in the club that night was Reginald Clifford. So Wednesday came; it seemed to his impatient mind that all the Wednesdays in the year had been rolled into one on purpose to annoy him; but that too passed, and early on Thursday he found himself whirling away to Northumberland, the happiest man in the United Kingdom.

CHAPTER XII.

"After the knell, the wedding bells;
After the bud, the radiant rose;
Joyful greetings from sad farewells;
After the weeping, sweet repose."

GEO. COOPER.

AFTER many delays and innumerable stoppages the train whistled into the little Clifden station, and Reginald found himself on the platform with Sir Roger beside him.

"My dear boy, delighted to see you," he exclaimed in his kind way. "Come, there is no need of delay, the carriage is on the other side." Miss Percie meanwhile, at home, was nervously superintending her toilette. Since the day upon which her note had been dispatched, she had been in a perfect flutter of excitement, and now that the time for Clifford's arrival had come, she would

gladly have feigned a headache, anything, to keep her in her own room. Why was she thus strangely affected by the coming of a man who, she had so persistently assured herself, did not care for her in the least?

Sir Roger had found Reginald's secret lay heavy on his soul; so in a moment of confidence, weak man that he was, he imparted it to his daughter. With what composure she received it, I need not say. Now, however, she could almost hear the beating of her own heart, as the carriage drew up before the door, and her father and his guest descended. It had taken our heroine some time to decide what her costume should be; at last she had concluded that her usual evening dresses were too gay, and, to the disgust of her maid, insisted upon simple white, with roses as her only ornament. It was some time before Reginald entered the drawing-room; then Lady Montague rose and came forward with much rustling of silks, and the figure in white extended a very

cold little hand, and "hoped Sir Reginald was not tired from his long journey." "No," Sir Reginald was "not tired;" on the contrary, he had "enjoyed it immensely." Then followed an exceedingly interesting conversation on the chances for crops, rain, and fair weather, the relative merits of real and artificial bait, the different modes of travelling in England and America, until dinner was announced, to which festive board our hero escorted Lady Montague, and really managed to keep up a very intelligent conversation with her ladyship, although the knowledge that a pair of soft dark eyes were watching him intently did not serve to set him more at his ease. The evening passed in a very commonplace manner. Miss Percie, having recovered from her embarrassment, was very much the same as upon former meetings. Reginald began to wonder if, after all, he had not better put off his declaration until she became more friendly. The next morning Clifford felt himself

a man again, he was gravely polite to Miss Percie, conversationally disposed toward her father, and heartily glad that a severe attack of neuralgia confined Lady Montague to her own apartments.

"My dear Clifford, I shall have to leave you for a little time this morning, as I have some business to transact several miles away. I shall, however, return as soon after luncheon as I can; meanwhile make yourself perfectly at home; remember that everything in the house is at your disposal." Sir Roger rose as he concluded. Clifford followed his example, and the two entered the library together.

"I have several letters to write which will take me some time; so I shall have no opportunity of running away," said Clifford, establishing himself at the writing-table.

"All right, my boy; here are the horses." Sir Roger, waving his farewells, withdrew, and soon after our hero saw him riding away, with his bailiff in attendance, towards Clifden village. The

letters occupied the better part of the morning, and it was past midday when Clifford sallied forth for a walk on the cliffs. It was very warm, with the summer sun beating fiercely down upon the sands, but still he wandered on, until he reached a spot where an overhanging rock formed a delightfully cool retreat. He had no sooner reached the beach below, than he found he was not to be alone. Miss Percie had established herself there, thrown aside her broad hat, and the sea breeze was playing with the waves and curls of golden hair about her temples. She was evidently too much engrossed with her occupation to notice our hero, who paused for a few moments to admire the pretty picture she unconsciously made.

"Good-morning, Miss Percie, you have chosen a delightfully cool spot for your meditations." She started a little, closed her book, and smiled.

"Yes, I am so very fond of the ocean that I generally spend my mornings here."

"I admire your taste," he answered, seating

himself at her feet, and pushing back his hat to cool his heated brow. "You have a magnificent prospect from here."

"Yes, and the house is just in sight beyond that point of land; besides, they all know me about here, so I am not at all afraid." They talked on for some time; at last, little by little, the conversation took a more serious turn, and almost before he knew it, Reginald was speaking of the thing which lay nearest his heart, telling of his years of devotion, with the murmuring water playing a soft accompaniment to his low impassioned tones, and a saucy sand martin, with its head on one side, winking its round black eye in his face. Miss Percie listened, the tears welling up in her dark eyes.

"Oh, Reginald! what can I say, what have I to give in return for love like yours?"

"Yourself," he whispered, gently.

So everything was settled to the satisfaction of both parties, and the first thing Sir Roger had to

listen to on his return, was the foolish little story which Clifford told with much hesitation. Of course the baronet was delighted; and Lady Montague, who seemed to think this blissful state of affairs had been brought about entirely by her good management, called Clifford "Reginald, my dear boy," in a most delightful manner. It seemed as if the golden hours of that happy day were all too short for the lovers' enjoyment. The Abbey and wishing-well were visited, and there was no Fred now to mar our heroine's enjoyment, and she drove home through the summer stillness with Reginald beside her. Never was mortal in a more blissful state of delight than our hero. He could not do enough to show his devotion for the object of his affections, and Lady Montague, with tears in her eyes, declared it was just her young days over again.

But days, fraught with happiness though they be, must come to an end at last, and one fine morning, our hero declared his intention of returning

to town, as important business called him thither. How different were his farewells this time from what they had been when he last parted from Miss Percie in Paris! Never mind how they were accomplished, they were over at last; and Sir Roger, laughingly declaring, "you might think from the parting Reginald meditated never returning," closed the carriage door, and Clifford drove off, waving an adieu to the slender figure in the doorway.

Some days later, Mrs. Merton's heart was rejoiced by hearing that the young master intended marrying in a few months, and workmen arrived from almost every quarter of London, to decorate the house, and make it more cheerful. The great rooms from which light and air had so long been excluded were thrown open, and in a short time shone resplendent in fresh satin and paint. Trees were trimmed, hedges cut, flower beds planted, a conservatory thrown out from what was to be Lady Clifford's boudoir. In fact the whole place

threw off its sombre attire, and donned holiday garb. "Fashionable Intelligence" was on the *qui vive;* never did Aladdin's palace rival in splendor the reports current respecting Deergrove. The Clifford diamonds being reset by the court jeweller, handsome though they were, gained several carats as they appeared in print. The great wedding was *the* topic of conversation, and the happy pair were united in every conceivable and inconceivable place, from Westminster Abbey to Gretna Green.

At last "Fashionable Intelligence" announced, to the wondering throng, that the marriage was to be solemnized in the village church of Clifden, on the first day of September. Then did the upper ten of London wonder and gossip. Then did Belgravia's fair daughters deplore their fate, wonder what he could have seen in that horridly phlegmatic person to care for, they, for their part, having never considered *her* much. Then did the fairest flowers of clubdom vote Clifford a lucky dog. Never, I say, had any engagement, outside

the royal family, created such a stir. The blissful couple, after much urging, consented to come to town; whereupon Lady Aurelia Smith confided to her bosom friend Lady Samanthe Jones, that every thread of the trousseau was to come from Paris, which report was promptly quenched by Miss Brown, who had it from her maid, who was third cousin of a cousin of Miss Percie's maid, that everything was coming from London.

The season, after an unusually brilliant ending, was over, and the gay butterflies of fashion fluttered off to their respective homes. Every available room in the manor was thrown open and aired for the accommodation of the coming guests. Lady Montague was for once in her element; here, there, everywhere, up and down stairs, superintending moving of furniture, laying of carpets, and Heaven knows what. Time flew on rapid wings, and almost before they knew it the last days of August drew near. Monford had returned from the Continent on purpose to officiate as best man.

Geraldine was commencing to feel the least bit nervous. After all, the last few days of one's maiden life at home are sad times; the future is rather shadowy, and it is hard work launching our frail bark over the sands of good resolutions into the unknown sea. Miss Percie bore bravely up, however, and was the merriest of the party gathered about the table for the last dinner at home. Never, since the good old days of feasting, had the manor been so full to overflowing with guests; every available corner was occupied. The villagers kindly sheltered many of the gentlemen, and some even slept on board Sir Roger's yacht, which was anchored off the house. The day closed in with a blinding storm of driving rain, no happy omen for the morrow. There was much yet remaining to be attended to; many little trifles left to the last, and very often forgotten altogether. The pretty village schoolmistress was in a flutter of excitement lest the children should forget their parts in the choral service. Geraldine, in her own room,

stood arrayed in her bridal finery, which had just arrived from town, while Marie the maid stood in perfect ecstasies, clasping her hands, and repeatedly saying that her mistress would be the handsomest bride ever seen. So the last evening in her old home passed, and the wind chanted her lullaby among the great trees, as it had done so often before, for the last time.

The wedding morning dawned dark and cloudy, rain falling at intervals. Every member of the household was up betimes, drawing his or her conclusion from the appearance of the sky. The village church of Clifden was remarkably beautiful, adorned by numerous stained-glass windows and superb frescoes. Along the walls from floor to ceiling were tablets to the memory of Percies, away back to Sir Hugo de Percie who fell at Hastings. There were monuments too; effigies of deceased Percies in every position, whose placid marble features remained undisturbed by the bustle of preparation around them. The floral decorations

were exquisite, roses and heart's-ease, the bride's favorite flowers, predominating. This was entirely a labor of love, having been performed by the school children, who, in common with the rest of the village, regarded Miss Percie as a beneficent fairy to be worshipped from afar. Mrs. Merton had come from Deergrove to pay, as she said, "her duty to the bride"; she, like the rest, had been captivated by her lovely face and winning manners. Pigot too was delighted. To be sure, Marie now treated him with the greatest disdain, but, removed from the fascinating society of the serving gentlemen to be found at Clifden, might she not give him a few of the smiles she so lavishly bestowed upon his more fortunate fellows? "Like mistress like maid" is an old adage, and the coquettish French woman made havoc as freely among the hearts in the servants' hall as her mistress had done in the drawing-room. Breakfast was dispensed in the peculiarly uncomfortable manner breakfasts usually are on the morning of

a wedding. The great event of the day, namely, dressing for the ceremony, commenced. Then might be heard cries of, "Maud, where is my fichu?" "No, you didn't put it there at all." "Now, Celine, stick a hair-pin there, and arrange those roses a trifle more to the left." "Never again will I wear mauve, I look like a fright." "By Jove! these shoes are uncommonly tight;" this in a masculine voice from the billiard-room, where several of the male guests have spent the night, in close proximity to cues, billiard balls, and chalk. "Now, I flatter myself this is a neat cut; Poole, of course;" and various other remarks of a like nature. Pigot, half wild with importance, but whose presence of mind never forsook him even under these trying circumstances, is dispensing favors to the guests. Gunter's men, from London, are flying hither and thither; innumerable orders are being issued from every part of the house. Suddenly the clock chimes half past eleven; then arises a hue and cry for the bride. Up to this moment, all have

been too much engrossed with their own particular selves to heed the most important part of the entertainment. She is in the library with her father. Sir Roger is having a few last words with the idol about to be taken from him. Another had usurped the place in her heart which he had once held; she would soon be his no longer.

"Heaven bless my little girl, and keep her always," he murmured, pressing a fervent kiss upon her fair brow; "come, my darling," and he led the way to the carriage.

The organist had taken his place, and the mellow notes were sounding through the building, evoking dormant echoes from the vaulted roof, and vibrating again and again among the delicately carved columns. The beauty and fashion of the great city and the neighboring country-side were well represented, and there was a soft rustle of silk, and a low murmur of voices; the waving of fans, and the glitter of jewels. Every one had something to say in praise of bride, or groom, or both.

At length the Dean of ——, very pompous, and the Archbishop of ——, very stiff and prim, followed by the timid little rector, who seemed quite overwhelmed at finding himself in such grand company, appeared in the chancel, just as the bridal party entered the church door. First of all the eight bridesmaids, two and two abreast, and lastly Sir Roger and the bride. Never perhaps in her whole life had Geraldine Percie looked more lovely; her cheeks were suffused with a delicate carmine, and her eyes bent down; there was something regal in the whole figure, with its robe of satin, and soft tulle veil, confined in its place by a coronet of diamonds, the same jewels glittering upon her neck and arms. Well might Mrs. Merton whisper to her nearest neighbor, a little scullery maid from the manor whom in other days she would have scorned, "Do you wonder I wanted the Clifford diamonds to see the light again?" There was a solemn hush throughout the building as the party stopped at the chancel rail, and the dean

in his affected voice drawled, "Dearly beloved brethren," etc. At the first words Miss Percie raised her head, and stood proudly erect during the whole service, her voice never faltering as she took the solemn vows upon herself, although Clifford's trembled with earnestness, as he swore to love and cherish the woman by his side. Ah! well he knew how he loved her, how until death his vows should be kept. The baronet had placed his daughter's hand in that of Clifford; she was his now, forever and ever. "Those whom God hath joined together let not man put asunder," said the archbishop. At this moment the sun burst from behind the clouds, and, streaming through the stained-glass window, sent bright shafts of blue and orange upon the golden head of the bride, and caused the diamonds in her tiara to sparkle and shoot forth myriads of tiny rays—a truly happy omen for the future. The last words were spoken, the benediction was pronounced, and Reginald had received the first kiss at the altar from his wife.

There was such a look of perfect peace upon his handsome face, and of blushing happiness upon his bride's, that it was no wonder Lady Montague was moved to tears, and her better half, who had never been known to advance a remark upon his own responsibility before, exclaimed, "Bless my soul! did you ever?" which original observation being promptly quenched by his spouse, he subsided for the remainder of the day. Gayly the village children strewed flowers in the bride's path, merrily chimed the bells, as the party left the church. No need to follow our heroine further; she has crossed the threshold of her new life, and we cannot follow. Her future with such a helpmate can but be surmised, for, although synonymous terms, Lady Clifford of Deergrove Park can no longer be recognized by the title of Miss Percie of Clifden.

FINIS.